



The White Hills Park Federation Trust
A Culture of Excellence

**GUIDANCE FOR STAFF ON THE
CONTACT BETWEEN STAFF AND STUDENTS
(INCLUDING FORMER STUDENTS)
OUTSIDE THE USUAL WORK CONTEXT**

Updated: October 2016
Review: October 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The need for a policy of this nature **applies to:**

- **all employees in primary, secondary and special schools where the Directors have a delegated budget and powers of local management.**
- **any form of contact outside the usual work context between staff and students or their families. This includes non-direct contact such as telephone, via text message, email or on social networking sites.**
- **contact outside the usual work context between staff and former-students, including those who have grown to adults.**

This policy cannot cover all situations. Staff at times will be required to exercise their professional judgment and should seek guidance and support from the Executive Headteacher, or from the Chair of Directors in the case of the Executive Headteacher, if he or she is unsure as to how to handle a situation.

Depending on the circumstances, inappropriate contact and/or a failure to follow advice will be treated seriously and could lead to the initiation of the Safeguarding procedures of the Local Authority and to disciplinary action.

If the Executive Headteacher is unsure as to how to handle a situation within the context of this policy, he should discuss his concerns with the Chair of Directors in the first instance and contact the Local Authority Human Resource team, if appropriate.

1.2 It is the policy of The White Hills Park Federation Trust (the Federation) that there will be no personal contact other than in certain exceptional circumstances, between staff and current or former students outside the normal working environment. Examples of exceptional circumstances could include: sporting activities, organised social circumstances (such as organised sports events, shared interests such as volunteering or scouts). Guidance on Safer Working Practice is explicit that **staff should not establish or seek to establish social contact with students for the purpose of securing friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship.** The reasons for this are:-

- Such contact can blur the professional boundaries between the staff member and student

- Such contact can compromise confidentiality
- Such contact can place both student and the staff member in a position of vulnerability
- Students at the Federation may struggle to differentiate between the role of staff member and friend. They may therefore have expectations which the staff member cannot fulfil.
- Such contact could be considered rightly or wrongly as grooming.

2. INTENDED CONTACT

- 2.1 In many cases contact outside the working environment is normal. For example, where staff have their own children at school; their friends are visiting or where private tuition is provided.
- 2.2 **Any proposed work-related contact, outside of the normal working environment, must be agreed in advance by the Executive Headteacher,** (for example private tuition). If agreed, a record of this must be kept on the staff members' personal file and the student's file. The record must set out reasons for the proposed contact.
- 2.3 All such contact must also be monitored by the member of staff's line manager and the Executive Headteacher,
- 2.4 For situations involving former students - see Clause 5.

3. UNPLANNED CONTACT

- 3.1 Unplanned or unexpected contact with students, with whom a member of staff may or may not have on-going professional contact, is inevitable at some point and this should be of a minimal nature (e.g. a brief greeting in the street).

4. CONTACT WITH CURRENT STUDENTS WITHIN THE FEDERATION

- 4.1 Copies of any correspondence received by a member of staff should be drawn to the attention of their line manager and the Executive Headteacher and filed with any response in the appropriate schools' records system.
- 4.2 The Federation internal email system and Federation computer equipment should only be used in accordance with Federation I.T. policy and the internal email system shall be the sole means of email contact between staff and students in the Federation.
- 4.3 **Staff should be cautious when using social networking sites outside of work and avoid publishing, or allowing to be published, any material,**

including comments or images, that could damage their professional reputation and/or bring the Federation into disrepute.

Staff should be strongly advised to set their profile as 'private' and not allow access to students, their families and or carers.

Locally there have been incidents of students misinterpreting the nature of their relationship with members of staff as a direct result of them having contact on social networking sites.

Staff should also be mindful that requirements in relation to maintaining the confidentiality of students, their families, colleagues and the Federation itself apply to all forms of communication, including that which takes place on social networking sites.

Staff Rules for the use of Social Networking Sites are annexed to this document as Appendix 1.

- 4.4 Staff should not give their personal details, such as home or personal mobile phone number; home or personal email addresses to students, unless the need to do so is agreed in advance with the Executive Headteacher. Any ongoing contact from the student outside of the agreed contact should be reported immediately to the Executive Headteacher by the staff member involved.
- 4.5 There will be times, for example during school trips, when, exceptionally, it will be appropriate for a member of staff to temporarily share their personal mobile telephone number with students, perhaps in an emergency situation. Any such issue of a personal mobile telephone number should be reported by the member of staff concerned to the Executive Headteacher as soon as possible.

Every effort should be made to ensure that in such circumstances numbers are stored for the limited period of the trip and **every effort should be made by the Federation to provide staff with school mobile telephones**, as necessary, and whether temporary or permanent, such mobile telephone to be used on school business only.

5. CONTACT WITH FORMER STUDENTS

- 5.1 In some circumstances, former students may make contact with a member of staff. This may occur even when they have grown to adults. For example, situations where staff remain in contact with former students who have moved on to secondary school or 6th form studies, who attend university or who have been placed in care or adopted.
- 5.2 In these situations, members of staff must take account of the fact that they are Federation employees and therefore have a responsibility as a member of staff and that young people may struggle to differentiate between the roles of staff member and friend.

Staff members must always discuss any such significant contact with their current line manager and the Executive Headteacher and seek advice on how to manage any future contact.

The sole means of email contact between staff and former students of the Federation shall be through the Federation email system for the member of staff and not using any staff home or personal email address.

Staff guidance for the use of Social Networking sites as annexed to this document as Appendix 1 shall also apply to contact between staff and former students.

- 5.3 If a former student requires assistance or some form of help that lies outside the Federation, they should be signposted to relevant services. However, if the Executive Headteacher agrees that further contact with the staff member is relevant and appropriate, a clear plan of involvement, including outcomes expected and timescales must be drawn up and agreed by the Executive Headteacher.
- 5.4 In these circumstances, the Executive Headteacher must ensure that adequate support/supervision is available to the staff member and ensure that all such contacts and plans are recorded and that other appropriate agencies are involved.
- 5.5 Where a close relationship develops between a member of Federation staff and an ex-student which may raise concerns about the member of staff's suitability to work with children, the Executive Headteacher should contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for advice and guidance. The LADO, Eva Callaghan can be contacted on 0115 8041272 or email: eva.callaghan@nottscc.gov.uk

FURTHER GUIDANCE

Further guidance can be found in the documents:

“Guidance for Safe Working Practice for the Protection of Children and Staff in Education Settings” - Available in the practice guidance section of the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children board WebPages www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/nscb

NEOST Guidance on Conduct for Teachers, Education Staff and Volunteers – September 2002.

TeacherNet: www.teachernet.gov.uk

Becta: schools.becta.org.uk

This policy has been approved by the Recognised Trade Unions.

APPENDIX 1

THE STAFF RULES FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

These rules form Appendix 1 to clause 4.3 of the Policy on the Contact between Staff and Students including former students outside the usual work context.

Members of staff should not be in contact with current Federation Students via social networking sites such as Facebook.com. This is in accordance with current safeguarding practice.

Members of staff with Facebook or other social networking profiles are strongly requested to set the privacy levels on their accounts to maximum i.e. only people on their friend's list should be able to view their pictures/private information, status etc.

Please be aware that if you share information with "friends of friends" there is a potential for literally thousands of people to view your profile, information, pictures and status, most of whom you will not know. This leaves the potential for current students to then still be able to access your profile.

Failure to set the appropriate security options this may result in students or parents seeing private photographs or reading comments that could potentially compromise your position as a role model and a responsible member of staff and in the worst case and possibly bring yourself, others or the Federation into disrepute.

Action to be taken if a member of staff is contacted by a student or former student

If a message from a student or former student is received, the following action should be taken:

1. Do not reply to the message. Replying to a message could allow the recipient to view your profile in its entirety and may circumvent other privacy settings on your account.
2. **Do not delete the message.**
3. A senior member of pastoral staff should be contacted at the earliest opportunity and informed of the contact made.
4. If the content or language used in the students contact to the member of staff is inappropriate the senior member of pastoral staff should follow this up. At this point a **print out** of the communication should be provided to the member of pastoral staff dealing with the incident.

If an invitation to a person's friends list is received the following action should be taken:

1. Reject the request and consider blocking that person or hiding your profile to avoid searching by people not on your friends list.
2. If the student has made several attempts to "be your friend" please inform a senior member of the pastoral team who should then speak to the student, if in school, on your behalf, about the reasons that this contact is inappropriate.
3. The senior member of the pastoral team will report the incident to the Executive Headteacher at the earliest opportunity.

If you are already friends with any current or former Federation students these should be reported to the Executive Headteacher immediately and then removed.

If you are unsure how to set privacy settings on your social networking accounts please speak with the IT Services team who will be able to point you towards the appropriate guide.