



# Ark Social Media Guidelines

*February 2015*

## Introduction

It is important that Ark employees use social media responsibly, as our online communications can have an impact on our workplace environment and on our reputation. These guidelines should be considered within the context of Ark's mission, vision and values.

## What is social media?

Social media includes not only social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIn and Flickr, but also blogs, wikis, forums and other similar websites.

## Who do these guidelines apply to?

These guidelines apply to Ark employees who use social media either in a personal capacity, or as part of their work. Ark expects our staff, as well as our volunteers, consultants and temporary / agency workers to exercise good judgement and common sense online.

Everyone is responsible for their conduct online and on social media and people remain personally accountable for any content they post or share online whether it is meant to be publically accessible or private.

## Links to other policies

We expect all staff to ensure they understand and follow these guidelines. Failure to do so may affect their employment with Ark. These guidelines should be used in conjunction with the following Ark policies, which can be obtained from HR:

- Safeguarding
- Disciplinary
- Grievance
- IT policy
- Code of conduct
- Equal opportunities policy
- Dignity at work policy

## Code of conduct

No information is totally secure and if staff do not want information to be in the public domain, they should refrain from posting it online. For example, posts restricted to friends-only can be captured in a screenshot and shared with others. In other circumstances, when using an alias or posting anonymously, individuals may be recognised by others.

Any material posted online that is related to Ark, our employees or our work is the responsibility of the individual who posts it. Staff must maintain professionalism, honesty and integrity at all times. In particular, they must respect others and ensure that they do not



make any inappropriate, abusive, hateful or derogatory remarks that could be misunderstood by others. Breaches of Ark's social media guidelines may constitute breaches of the organisation's code of conduct (and other policies) and may make you liable to disciplinary action.

## Using social media as part of your role

School-based staff must have permission from their Headteacher before posting content on social media accounts representing their school or the work that they do. Staff use of social media will be subject to the requirements of their role and every employee will be expected to adhere to their academy's policies and procedures, as well as these guidelines.

Central-based staff must have permission from the Ark communications team before posting content on social media accounts meant to represent Ark, or the work they do for Ark. Staff use of social media will be subject to the requirements of their role and every employee will be expected to adhere to Ark's policies and procedures, as well as these guidelines.

### **Using images of students:**

Staff must notify in advance their school head if they would like to post or share content about their students, whether it is part of their role or not. There are specific occasions when it may be appropriate for staff to refer to students on social media – for example, when tweeting from an official school account a photograph from a football match or congratulating students for their hard work.

Schools must obtain permission for the use of images of students in their marketing (which would include social media). This is usually done as part of a school's home-school agreement signed by parents. If you or your school needs advice on how to obtain this parental permission, you should contact the Ark central communications team. It is the responsibility of the person posting content on social media to ensure that any student pictured or identified is covered under such an agreement. Parents have the right to opt their children out, and this right should be respected. Any student imagery used online should only include their first name, and possibly their school year, but no other identifying information.

### **Using images of colleagues:**

Similarly, colleagues may not wish to be quoted or pictured online so seek their permission. It is also pivotal that colleagues maintain a respectful and professional attitude towards each other on social media. Bullying of any kind is subject to disciplinary action, as per the dignity at work and grievance policies.

## Using social media in your private life, and its potential impact on your role

Ark recognises that employees may be active users of social media in their personal lives.

In the event that employees are contacted directly by students on social media, they should respond only to remind the student of the appropriate way to get in touch in accordance with



their school's policies. Under no circumstances may staff invite or seek contact with pupils on social media.

Employees may respond to parents who contact them directly on social media if they so wish, providing their communication is respectful, professional and appropriate at all times. However, staff must ensure that their posts adhere to the guidelines above, including but not limited to breaches of confidentiality and anything that may negatively impact on the reputation of our schools.

It's really important that Ark staff maintain boundaries between personal and professional relationships.

## **Guidance on setting up official social media accounts**

Staff must not set up accounts related to their school or use school branding on their personal accounts without express permission from their Headteacher.

Ark central staff must not set up accounts related to their work at Ark without permission from the Ark communications team.

Unauthorised accounts that represent themselves as official, using school or Ark branding, will need to be taken down.

Students also are forbidden from setting up social media or other online accounts related to their school or Ark. Unauthorised accounts that represent themselves as official, using school or Ark branding, will need to be taken down.

Staff should contact the Ark communications team as soon as possible for advice if they think they may have an existing branded account related to their school.

Staff who wish to use social media in the classroom or as part of learning may consider setting up a subject account such as @BDAPhysics (Ark Burlington Danes' Twitter physics account) but this must be approved by the Headteacher or Principal of the school, and the Ark Communications team must be made aware of account.

This also applies to use of website services that function secondarily as social media platforms, such as YouTube. If you need a place to host a video about your school, you may create an account and post it to YouTube, Vimeo or a similar provided you do with the permission of your school's headteacher or principal. All the guidelines above apply to use of this account.

## **FAQs**

### **How do I use social media to promote my work or my school effectively?**

The Ark Communications team has put together advice and tips on how to use social media to effectively promote your work or your school. This document is available on request. Nothing in this document supersedes the guidance and guidelines contained in this document or relevant IT, HR, Safeguarding or other policies.



## **Am I allowed to talk about my work on social media?**

For some of our staff, using social media may be part of their work responsibilities. In general, staff are allowed to discuss their work on social media, provided they are aware that they are entirely responsible for the content that they post or share, as per these guidelines.

## **What if I notice something inappropriate on social media?**

There is essentially no difference between how you should handle the discovery of something inappropriate on social media than if you were to discover it in any other way or any other format. You should report your concerns to your line manager, your school head, or your safeguarding officer, as appropriate. Schools are advised to monitor social media networks to identify any potential problems.

## **Who is responsible for our social media accounts?**

Every school is responsible for its own social media accounts and their content. Ark can offer advice and can enforce the guidelines contained in this document, but the content your school creates or shares is owned by the author/poster of that content, answerable to the school's senior leadership and Ark.

A school's Headteacher may make the decision not to engage in social media at all, and while we advise against that (as people will be talking about your school there whether you choose to participate or not) – ultimately the decision is up to each individual school.

## **What we expect you to do**

All staff should apply good judgement to every activity they conduct online and consider if it could be a breach of confidentiality, considered distasteful or a negative representation of themselves, our schools, pupils, parents, staff, governors, any other member of Ark or external stakeholders.

As outlined above, all staff are considered to be individually responsible for what they post or share online. If they are unsure about posting something, they should stop and think before posting. If in doubt, they can contact the Ark communications team for advice or they can discuss the issue with their line manager.

In order to protect Ark's reputation, the communications team monitors social media and regularly tracks mentions of our schools or other keywords related to our work. Staff should be aware of this and restrict their posts if they do not wish to appear in public searches.

Finally, we expect staff to ask for advice if they are unsure about how to use social media appropriately. You can contact HR or the communications team at [websites@arkonline.org](mailto:websites@arkonline.org)

## **Examples of misconduct**

- Staff must not make comments, post or share content that could be regarded as bullying, harassment or defamatory. This means that staff must not post or share content that is malicious, untrue, hurtful, personal or otherwise inherently offensive about any party.



- Staff must not refer to proprietary information related to Ark or their school, such as strategic decisions, pay, personal information or any other material deemed inappropriate for uncoordinated public exchange. Sharing such information may be a breach of your contract.
- Staff must not post or share any content that may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, confidentiality, data protection or other claims for damages from Ark or their school. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring Ark into disrepute. It also includes information that does or is likely to harm, lower or damage the reputation of Ark, its employees, students, parents of students or other school or Ark stakeholders.
- Staff must not share photographs or video of any Ark students, parents of students, staff or other Ark stakeholders without their consent. In particular, sharing images of pupils requires parental consent and the prior approval of both the school Headteacher and the communications team.
- Staff must not post or share any content that breaches confidentiality or is deemed to be detrimental to Ark, its employees, students, parents of students or other school or Ark stakeholders.
- Staff must not use social media to communicate with parents or pupils outside of the guidelines outlined below. If in doubt, staff must contact the Ark HR or communications teams.

If any activity of the above nature is discovered, it will be investigated under Ark's disciplinary procedures and dealt with as appropriate. Breaches of this guidance may be regarded as misconduct or even gross misconduct for a serious breach and could lead to disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal.

## **THE LAW**

All Ark employees should remember that information they share online is subject to copyright, data protection legislation, the Safeguarding and Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, DfE guidance and other legislation. This applies even when posts are restricted to "friends-only" or to private networks. In addition, digital communications sent from official email or social media accounts may be subject to freedom of information legislation.