



FARNBOROUGH HILL
WHOLEHEARTEDLY

ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS POLICY PUPILS, PARENTS and OLD GIRLS

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents and policies:

- School Parental Contract
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Exclusions Policy
- FHOGA Governing Guidelines Policy
- Technology Acceptable Use Policy for Pupils

The widespread availability and use of social media offers the opportunity to understand, engage, and communicate in exciting ways. It is important that we can use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly but it is also important to ensure that we balance this with our duties to our school, the community, our legal responsibilities and our reputation. For example, our use of social networking applications has implications for our duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The policy requirements in this document aim to provide this balance to support online engagement whilst providing a framework of good practice. The purpose of the policy is to:

- safeguard all children
- protect the School from legal risks
- ensure that the reputation of the School, its staff and governors is protected
- ensure that any users are able clearly to distinguish where information provided via social media is legitimately representative of the School

Definition and Scope

Social networking tools include, but are not limited to: blogs and podcasts, online discussion forums, collaborative spaces, media sharing services, 'microblogging' applications, and online gaming environments. Examples include but are not limited to X, Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, LinkedIn, TikTok, Vimeo, Mumsnet, , YouTube, Flickr, Xbox Live, Blogger, SnapChat, WhatsApp, Tumblr, Discord,, BeReal, and comment streams on public websites such as newspaper sites.

Many of the principles of this policy also apply to other types of online presence such as virtual worlds.

Users need to bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, are still subject to copyright, The Data Protection Act 2018 and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation.

Guidelines relating to Staff and Pupil communication

- Staff should not give their social media details to pupils, nor should they communicate with them by any form of social media
- Staff should not become 'friends' with, 'follow' or make direct connections on any social media sites with present pupils. This also applies to ex pupils until they are 18 and have finished secondary education.

- Where a social media link exists between school staff and pupils before they become employed/volunteer at the school, for example if they act as a sports coach to a pupil, we would expect staff to cease any of these social media links when they join the school
- Any communication received from children on any personal social media sites must be reported to the Head of Year, with the Designated Safeguarding Lead being copied in

Guidelines for Farnborough Hill Friends and other volunteers

- Views expressed/information posted must support the School's ethos and fundamental British values
- Users must keep their personal and professional/school lives separate. They should not put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between the School and their personal interests
- Users must not engage in activities involving social media which might bring Farnborough Hill into disrepute
- Users must never represent their personal views as those of Farnborough Hill on any social media
- Users must not discuss personal information relating to pupils, Farnborough Hill or the wider community on any social media
- Users must not use social media and the internet in any way to attack, insult, abuse or defame pupils, their family members, colleagues, other professionals, other organisations or Farnborough Hill

Guidelines for Parents and Old Girls

Farnborough Hill expects parents and Old Girls to behave in a civilised nature online and will not tolerate any of the following behaviour:

- posting defamatory 'statuses' about fellow parents, pupils, Old Girls, the School or its employees
- complaining about the School's values, processes, teaching and other methods on social media - the School has a clearly defined Complaints Procedures in place and requests that this is followed where it is felt necessary
- Farnborough Hill retains the right to request any damaging material to be removed from social media websites
- breaches of this code of conduct will be taken seriously by the School and, in the event of illegal, defamatory, or discriminatory content, breaches could lead to prosecution.

Online messaging

The School appreciates the simplicity and ease of instant messaging online; keeping in contact outside of school can benefit the School community by keeping the School community closer. Farnborough Hill expects parents to use messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, for purposes beneficial to themselves and the School, and will not accept any of the following behaviour:

- sending abusive messages to fellow parents
- sending abusive messages about members of staff, pupils, governors, parents or the School
- sending abusive messages to members of staff, governors or pupils
- sending abusive messages to or about Old Girls

Should any problems arise from contact over messaging apps, the School will act quickly by

contacting parents or Old Girls directly, to stop any issues continuing. Farnborough Hill can request a meeting with parents or Old Girls if any misconduct, such as sending abusive messages or posting defamatory statuses, occurs online. The Headmistress can, with the permission of the person involved, view messages sent between members of the parental body or Old Girls in order to deal with problems quickly and effectively.

The Headmistress can request that 'group chats' are closed down should any problems continue between parents or parental bodies or Old Girls.

Guidelines for Pupils

When using social media or messaging services such as WhatsApp, pupils should ensure that they follow these guidelines, taken from the Farnborough Hill Technology Acceptable Use Policy for Pupils.

- I will not use social network sites or apps until I am legally old enough to do so. When I do so I will ensure that I follow all the rules set out in the School's Technology Acceptable Use Policy for Pupils
- I will always be polite and responsible when I communicate online. I will not use inappropriate, strong or aggressive language and I will appreciate that others may have different opinions
- I will not use any electronic means to embarrass, distress or bully others or that would bring the School into disrepute
- I will not take or distribute photos or videos of anyone without their permission, or store photos or videos of any activities in school without the permission of a member of staff
- Whilst it may be beneficial and appropriate to take a photograph of work on a smartboard in a classroom setting for educational purposes, I will not take any images or video footage (films) of teachers or lessons, without the express permission of the teacher
- I will not take, distribute or show inappropriate photos, videos or any other material that would cause harm or bring the School into disrepute
- I will not upload any photos or videos of school-based activities to social media, chat groups or any other online forum without permission from the school

Pupils should be aware that behaviour contrary to the School rules, Code of Conduct, Technology Acceptable Use Policy for Pupils and Behaviour Policy could result in sanctions being given, including, in serious cases, exclusion from school. In the most serious of cases the school reserves the right to involve the police and safeguarding authorities.

This policy is reviewed annually by the Director of Admissions and Marketing and the Headmistress.

The next review is due in August 2025.