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Statement of intent

Hawthorn Tree School understands the benefits of using social media; however if misused, the school community can be negatively affected. We strongly advise against:

- Making defamatory comments which damages the reputation of the school, its individual members of staff and governors.
- Posts making comments which the school considers to be of a threatening nature.

This code of conduct sets out clear procedures for how we expect parents to conduct themselves on social media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogging sites and when using messenger apps, such as WhatsApp.

1. Legal framework

1.1. This policy has due regard to statutory legislation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Malicious Communications Act, 1998
- Data Protection Act, 1998
- Defamation Act 2013
- Protection of Freedoms Act, 2012 (as amended)

2. E-safety and social media conduct

2.1. Hawthorn Tree School expects parents to behave in a civilised nature online and will not tolerate any of the following behaviour online:

- Posting defamatory 'statuses' about fellow parents, pupils, the school or its employees,
- Complaining about the school's values and methods on social media.

2.2. The school has a Complaints Procedures Policy in place, to avoid parents broadcasting grievances online.

2.3. Parents will be made aware of their responsibilities regarding their use of social networking and their conduct online. The Malicious Communications Act (1998) states that it is an offence to send another person a letter, electronic communication or article of any description which conveys:

- A message which is indecent or grossly offensive,
- A threat,
- Information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender.

The act explains that people are guilty of this offence where they intend to cause distress or anxiety to the recipient or any other person.

2.4. Breaches of this code of conduct will be taken seriously by the school and, in the event of illegal, defamatory, threatening or discriminatory content, breaches could lead to prosecution.

2.5. Parents will not attempt to 'friend' or 'follow' any member of staff on social media except by prior agreement.

2.6. Parents are instructed not to post anonymously or under an alias to evade the guidance given in this code of conduct.

2.7. Hawthorn Tree School retains the right to request any damaging material to be removed from social media websites.

3. Online messaging

3.1. Hawthorn Tree School 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

3.2. 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.

3.3. Should any problems arise from contact over messaging apps, the school will act quickly by contacting parents directly, to stop any issues continuing.

3.4. Hawthorn Tree School can request a meeting with parents if any misconduct, such as sending abusive messages or posting defamatory statuses, occurs online.

3.5. The school's complaints procedure will be followed as normal if any members of the Parent Friend Association (PFA) or governing body cause any discrepancies through their conduct whilst using online messaging.

3.6. The headteacher can, with the permission of the parent, view messages sent between members of the parental body in order to deal with problems quickly and effectively.

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

4. Monitoring and review

4.1. The headteacher will review this code of conduct on an annual basis and will communicate any changes to all teachers and parents.

4.2. All parents will be required to read this code of conduct.

5. UNICEF

As a UNICEF Rights respecting school, this Hawthorn Tree Policy recognises the following articles:

2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 39, 42. Please visit

<https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf> for more detail.