



St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Caring, Learning & Excelling

Since 1864

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Cyberbullying of School Staff: Information for Parents

Social Media is a wonderful tool for communication, including communications between pupils and between home and school. It can make our lives richer and help us to network with people we would never meet in 'real life'.

Sadly though, like any form of communication, this tool can be misused. Children can suffer cyberbullying from peers, and teachers and other school staff can suffer cyberbullying from pupils and even parents. Schools can take steps to address cyberbullying by pupils through their 'acceptable use' policies and by educating pupils as to how to engage with social media safely and responsibly. However, it can be more difficult to address cyberbullying of teachers and other staff by parents.

The Department for Education (DfE 2014) has indicated that, nationally, 21% of teachers have experienced cyber bullying from pupils or parents. Teachers are our greatest resource in school and it is in everyone's interests, especially our children's, to ensure we value them and protect them from harassment and abuse. For a while now at St. Michael's, some parents have created Closed Facebook Groups set up to share details of events etc. and keep everyone up to date about what is going on in a particular year group. In principle this can be helpful, however, it is quite alarming when even pupils report to us that their parents are using social media to moan about anything from missing jumpers to personal comments directly or indirectly made about individual staff which are deeply hurtful.

Of course, there are times when parents have legitimate concerns about their child's education and/or times when a teacher, or other staff member, gets it wrong. Every school has established processes for addressing concerns and most complaints will be dealt with under the school complaints procedure. What would parents think if we put every comment a child tells us about what happens at home on the school Facebook page? When a child comes out with the statement; 'Daddy left me alone at home' or 'Mummy shouts at me' or 'I get locked in my room' our first point is to have a private word with the parent, not spread it all over the internet!

In our school, most parents behave responsibly, but sadly there are occasions when some actively criticise teachers and school staff directly or indirectly on social media. This has an extremely damaging impact on the wellbeing of staff who work very hard. It also sets a very poor example to children as to the responsible use of social media. Are we being unreasonable or simply naïve in thinking we can communicate pleasantly with each other or are there similar groups complaining about local doctors' surgeries too?

Please can we all ensure that we use the proper channels to address any issues with our school and that we instruct our children, by example, that abusive posts and messages are simply not acceptable.

Isn't this the season of 'Peace & Goodwill' to all?

Mr P Fox
Headteacher

