

# Appendix 11 Online participation for Governors - Guidance

## Introduction

The way people communicate is changing, with use of the internet increasing throughout society. Most of us are very used to emailing, which continues to be a common form of communication for governors. But social networking tools such as Facebook can be used to have conversations online and for people to share information, experiences and knowledge.

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, may present incredible opportunities for school governors to communicate and collaborate more effectively – however there are risks and governors must be aware of the implications of participating online in their official capacity.

Below we have set out some of the considerations governors should bear in mind when using the web, to ensure risks are mitigated and opportunities maximised.

## The opportunities

Participating online offers a number of opportunities for school governors. For example:

**Communicating between governors:** using trusted online spaces, governors can have discussion online and share information with one another between face to face meetings, increasing efficiency. There is also the opportunity for governors to communicate with other governors in their local authority and nationally.

**Listening to what people are saying:** like it or not, people will be talking about your school online.

**Engaging with parents and students:** greater involvement from school stakeholders such as parents and students can be achieved by talking to them online, especially when using spaces they already visit regularly, such as Facebook

**Promoting the work of the governors:** by using digital channels to talk about the work governors are doing, more people will get to hear about and understand it

**Encouraging new people to become governors:** the visibility provided by participating online means that more people will be aware of the role and inspire them to get involved themselves

## The risks

As well as an incredible opportunity, digital participation is not without risk. Some of the risks include:

**A governor writes something inappropriate:** the ease of sharing thoughts and opinions online means it is easy to write something that could bring the school into disrepute.

**Confidential information is released to the public:** again, the fact that it is so easy to put information on the web means data security policy can be easily breached.

**An online discussion between some but not all members of a governing body undermines collective knowledge and responsibility:** there is a danger of a two-tier governing body resulting from online discussions that exclude those governors not online.

None of these risks are a reason for governors not to be active online. However, they are risks that need to be understood and managed.

## **Guiding principles**

The guiding principles for online participation really are no different to communicating in any other medium. The seven principles of public life (the Nolan Principles) are a very good starting point:

- **Selflessness**
- **Integrity**
- **Objectivity**
- **Accountability**
- **Openness**
- **Honesty**
- **Leadership**

For e communication, you also need to consider the following:

- Governors must always be aware that what they say and write as an individual could reflect negatively on them as a governor, their fellow governors or their school.
- Always remember that participation online results in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media. Stay within the legal framework and be aware that libel, defamation, copyright and data protection laws apply. This means that you should not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of the school unless you are authorised to do so.
- Be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent.
- Be cordial, honest and professional at all times.
- Wherever possible, align online participation with other (offline) communications.

## **The different sites**

The following covers the main sites for online interaction and how they are used.

### **Facebook**

Facebook is the world's largest social network and is continuing to grow. Users create profiles with personal information, and connect to their friends online. They can also create and join groups around common interests and causes. Facebook is widely used by young and old, and it is very likely that the site is being used by parents to discuss their childrens' school.

## Twitter

Twitter is a website where users create a much less detailed profile than in Facebook, and publish short messages. These are published publicly, and users 'follow' one another to receive their updates. Twitter has a smaller user base than Facebook but this is growing.

## Blogging

A blog is a website where an individual or group of authors publish short articles. Blogs may be a good way to publicise the activity at a school, and as an informal method of finding out people's views.

## LinkedIn

LinkedIn is another social network, similar to Facebook, although its focus is very much on people's professional rather than personal lives.

## YouTube

YouTube is the most popular video website in the world. It allows users to upload short videos for other people to view.

## Things to do

**Start a discussion:** As a governing body, use this information as the basis for a discussion as part of a governing body meeting, in order to clarify common expectations and standards. Your headteacher may have strong views on this!

**Look at your school's policy on E Safety / Online Participation:** As a governor, you may wish to follow the same rules as apply to other members of the leadership team and school staff.

**Review your governing body's Code of Conduct:** Consider adding a section on online participation.

**Do some research:** spend some time searching the web for mentions of your school online. You might find that a local blogger has been writing about you, or perhaps parents have started a Facebook group.

**Consider creating your own social networking groups:** Firstly, if one doesn't already exist, a Facebook group for your school might be a great way to get governors, teachers and parents talking to one another regularly in an informal, constructive way. Secondly, why not create a group for just governors to use, to discuss issues in between formal meetings, share information and work together on reports and other documents?

**Register with Twitter:** Twitter provides a really quick way to get active online. There are also a number of school governors active on there who you can connect with.