

# DIGITAL

# Communication

**Teachers communicate using many methods of digital communication. Common sense and accepted practice should help to guide our use of all digital technologies.**

This guidance has been updated by PPTA's ICT Advisory Group as assistance for teachers in their use of these technologies. All communication should be within the principles of the *Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers*. You should ensure that you are familiar with your school's policies and procedures on the use of these technologies.

Due to the ever-changing nature of the online environment and advances in technology we would strongly advise ongoing professional learning. The Teachers Council has developed a website which provides resources which can be used in staff meetings and workshops to support your professional learning.

The document is in three parts:

- ⊙ **Social media**
- ⊙ **Email**
- ⊙ **Phone**

The New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association represents the professional and industrial interests of some 17,000 secondary teachers in state secondary, area, manual training and intermediate schools, as well as tutors in community education institutions, alternative education and activity centres, and principals in secondary and area schools. More than 95% of eligible teachers choose to belong to the association.

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## Social media

Social media can provide useful and powerful teaching and learning opportunities for teachers and students who use them. However the open nature of the internet environment can mean there is an element of risk for both teachers and students.

### What do I need to know about using social media tools with classes?

1. Know your school's social media policy and procedures and follow your school's teacher/student use agreements.
2. Know your copyright responsibilities.
3. Have a sound reason for using the tools. You may be challenged by the school community at some point, probably from a standpoint of, "is this appropriate?" Your use of social media should be based on sound educational reasoning.
4. Choose social media tools that have settings that allow easy control of access and privacy.
5. Teachers using and administering social media tools need to be confident to manage their students use of the tool. They also need to be able to answer questions from other professionals and parents should they arise.
6. Consider your own and your students' workload – what activity



does this replace? When will you update/respond? How often?

7. When using social media tools and websites choose ones that:

- are designed for education.
- are recommended by other teachers.
- have an upfront usage policy.
- are easy to learn.
- use passwords to control access.
- allow posts to be deleted.

8. Be prepared to support any opinions or comments that you post. Identify yourself and be a role model for digital citizenship.

9. Ensure that your use of language and of students' names is appropriate and in keeping with the values and practice of your school. Insist that your students abide by these values and practices also.

## Where can I find more?

**NetSafe**, the internet safety group provides a variety of resources, including support and advice, for schools, students, and teachers on keeping safe online.

### **Netsafe website**

⦿ Digital citizenship resources can be located here: <http://www.mylgp.org.nz/aboutwhatisdigitalcitizenship/>

⦿ Netsafe kit: <http://www.netsafe.org.nz/thenetsafekitforschools/>

**The Teachers Council** has developed a website which promotes discussion about the *Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers* and its relationship to social media. This includes guidelines, videos and powerpoints for staff professional development, and links to other useful sites.

### **Teachers Council and social media website**

## What should my online life look like as teacher?

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, provide opportunities for teachers to link with like-minded people sharing ideas and information.

## Did I really want to say that?

Communication online is often informal. It lacks the nonverbal clues of our face-to-face conversations and it is easy to respond and publish before the time has been

taken to consider exactly what the communication was about and whether the quick-fire response really was the right one. A particular issue for teachers is that of maintaining appropriate student / teacher boundaries in these more informal forums.

## Who owns my data?

Teachers should be aware that the publication of private and personal information in any online form can be removed from your control. It can be copied, altered and republished on another website or in another format. Search engines store information and in this way often provide a link to material that the site owner thought they had removed.



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## tips for keeping safe online

1. Remember activities online affect your life offline.
2. Check your school policy.
3. Maintain appropriate student/teacher boundaries when using any social media.
4. Don't share anything online you wouldn't want to make public.
5. Read about the site you want to post information to in terms of privacy policy and terms of use.

6. Regularly review the privacy settings on any social media site that you use.

7. Ask permission first before sharing information or images of others.

8. Be careful about accepting friend requests and links from people you don't know or trust.

9. Have an appropriate picture of yourself as your profile image on social networking sites.

10. Don't use the same password for social networking sites as you do for online banking and credit card accounts. Make sure you have anti-virus, antiphishing and antispyware software on your computer that is running and up-to-date!

## How could that post impact my future?

Be aware that people may associate your online activity with your school or with your job as a teacher.

Teachers have been dismissed from their jobs as a result of writing inappropriate or negative comments about their school or members of staff. Potential employers are now regularly checking candidates by researching for your digital online presence and searching for their profiles on social networking, photo and video sites.

## What to do when others abuse your rights or misrepresent you online?

- ⦿ Take a screenshot or photo then ask them to remove the offending material.
- ⦿ Contact the site and request they remove the information (what is the site's grievance procedure?)
- ⦿ Contact a senior team member to seek advice and support.
- ⦿ Further advice and guidance can be provided by Netsafe, your PPTA field officer or police where appropriate.



## Email

### What is your school's email usage policy?

Usage should be reasonable, responsible and professional. Members should in general abide by any and all school policies regarding the usage of their school's email system. It is important to realise that, as with any internet activity, email usage is easily tracked and monitored.

Members should also be aware that it is very clear from an email where the message was sent from. It's equivalent to using school letterhead and an envelope embossed with the school crest for conventional mail.

Emails do absorb resources and it is not unreasonable for schools to request that usage be confined to essential and/or school related matters.

### Work vs. home email addresses?

It is not unreasonable for a school to publish the email addresses of teachers, however only school-based and/or school funded email addresses should be published (Parents, students have always been able to write to teachers at school). Teachers' home addresses, phone numbers and fax numbers should never be published.

In general you should not use your own private email to reply to emails received from parents through the school system unless you are happy for parents to have this private address. Note the caution later about keeping records of email.

Members using their own email address to reply to emails from parents or students need to be aware that electronic backups of their mail may not be readily accessible from their ISP – it is particularly important that they keep their own printed and electronic copies of mail in this situation.

### How long before I need to reply?

A school should not give parents any indication of expected response times for email messages, nor should they require teachers to respond within a short time. Where a school wants to define guidelines for teachers, the time should be no shorter than two school days. Any time shorter than this could add significantly to a teacher's workload.

Members need to be aware that a rapid response can create an expectation that could be difficult to fulfil on subsequent occasions.

### What if there is a complaint?

All schools should have policies or procedures to be followed where a teacher receives a letter of complaint from a parent or student and these policies or procedures should apply for emails as well (for example, such emails should be reviewed by and responded to by the head of department or a senior manager).

Where a meeting is requested there should be a process to ensure that individual teachers are not left to deal with distressed/angry parents (for example the policy should require a dean or senior manager to be present and to chair the meeting).

Similarly, schools should have policies or procedures to follow when a teacher receives abusive or vexatious messages by letter, email or phone. Most schools would expect the teacher to document the complaint in their student management system and notify a senior leader.

In particular, members should think carefully and calmly before firing off a response. It's easy to include a comment in a reply that one later comes to regret. In many cases it's better to consult with a leader before responding.

### Should I keep that email?

Check your school's policy on keeping records of emails. You should endeavour to print out or back up important correspondence such as personal grievance, student assessments or parent communication. Most schools require important parent communication to be stored on the SMS (student management system).

### Who owns that email?

Unless a school has a Creative Commons policy, the Board of Trustees owns all communication and resources created by staff and students. Members need to be aware that all email messages sent and received through a school email system can generally be retrieved by system administrators or technicians, including those messages which have been "deleted", and that the school has a right to do this. Note also that copies may exist on each and every external mail server that has relayed the message from its source to its destination.

### What if I use my personal device for emails?

Check the policy to see if you are allowed to use your own device. Ensure that emails sent from your own device are copied onto the school email system. If you have more than one email address, use your school address.



## Phone contact with parents and students — voice, text, video, email

### What's your school policy on phone contact?

All communication should be reasonable, responsible and professional. Members should in general abide by any and all school policies regarding communication with family, whanau and community.

If your school requires you to make telephone contact with parents or students note the following:

### What do I need to know generally about contacting home?

- ⊙ Ask that the school provide you with information and/or training about the approach they wish you to take. [See also Appendix One.](#)
- ⊙ Ask the caller if this is a convenient time to talk.
- ⊙ Consider noting details of your call in your student management system. This provides a record if there is a subsequent complaint or dispute involving the call.

- ⊙ If you anticipate problems when calling parents or students, consider having someone else in the room who can verify what you said or did not say during the call. Alternatively consider recording your conversation with appropriate consent.
- ⊙ If you receive unsolicited and offensive communication, inform your head of department or a senior manager immediately and contact your field officer for advice.

### What do I need to know before making voice calls?

- ⊙ In general, try to ring from school, not from your home or from your personal cellphone. Note: If you must ring from home or from your personal cellphone consider withholding your number by dialing 0197 then the number you are calling – or use your mobile phone's settings menu to hide your number.
- ⊙ Identify who you're talking to. Be aware that you can never be absolutely

certain who it is you are talking to by phone.

### What do I need to know before sending text messages?

- ⊙ If you are texting a parent or student, bear in mind that the brevity of the message and the absence of context may invite misinterpretation. In general, only text parents with brief reminders or about a suitable time to call. More complex issues require a phone call, letter or meeting.
- ⊙ Remember that if you text someone they will then have your cellphone number.
- ⊙ If you receive a text message from a parent or student it isn't necessary to respond immediately, or at all. If the text is a complaint you should consult your head of department or a senior manager before responding.
- ⊙ Remember that you can't guarantee the identity of any text

"...But of course we'll still be friends on Facebook!"

senders/recipients. Texts should be treated as public documents (or postcards).

### What do I need to know before making a video call?

- ⊙ Check what can be seen on the video before you begin communication.
- ⊙ Ensure you're in a place where you won't be interrupted during the call.

### What do I need to know before using my personal device for emails?

- ⊙ Check the policy to see if you're allowed to use your own device. Ensure that emails sent from your own device are copied onto the school email system.
- ⊙ If you have more than one email address, use your school address.

## Appendix one

### Supporting teachers with phone calls to families

Schools may wish to develop a template or outline for staff making courtesy calls to families at the beginning of the school year. Prepare an outline of what you want to say, know your student (check your SMS or dean for information), listen and take notes, if the conversation becomes difficult know what you will do.

For example,

*Hello, this is [teacher name] from [school name]. I'm [child's name]'s teacher. I just wanted to introduce myself and let you know that [child's name] seems to be settling into the school year well. Also, if you have any questions I'd be happy to hear these.*

The point of this type of call is to give the teacher and parent a chance to establish a working relationship and to have a call that is neutral/positive. Later, should there be problems and a further call is needed, hopefully some positive rapport has already been established.

If in the course of one of these calls the parent becomes agitated, or has questions that are beyond the teacher's jurisdiction, it's also useful to have guidelines for ending the conversation appropriately. For example,

*Thank you for raising these points. I think that it's important for these to be answered – but I'll need to take these to the [dean/DP/HOD/principal]. I just want to check back with you*

*that I've correctly understood your questions/concerns... I'll take these to [name the person] tomorrow and they'll make contact with you after that. Would you prefer that contact to be by phone or email? [Get details]*

If further contact is to be by phone, try to establish a time and a number that best suits the parent, and pass that onto the relevant person.

At this point it should be possible to finish the conversation on good terms. For example,

*Thanks again for raising those points and for taking the time to talk with me. Hopefully I'll see you at the [orientation evening]...*

It's IMPERATIVE that the relevant staff member then makes the follow-up contact as agreed with the parent. It's the teacher's job to check back with the staff member (not the parent!) to ensure that happens within the next day or two.

### Good practice

It's also good practice for the dean or mentor teacher to sit with a new teacher to the school and model an appropriate conversation or two while they listen.

After that, the dean/mentor should remain with the new staff member while they make some calls, to listen and offer feedback and/or answer questions afterwards – and to be supportive and ensure that the staff member feels okay about continuing with this task.