
Use of social media: primary schools

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Summary Overview

An online focus group was carried out with nine primary school teachers to explore their use of social media in a professional capacity. The main objective was to find out how primary school teachers use different services, and how this can impact on the social media strategies adopted by commercial providers.

The overarching findings from the online focus group are as follows:

- Primary teachers are active in their professional use of social media, turning to different sites for different reasons. The opportunities that each service offers commercial providers are described in further detail below.
- Teachers use services that support sharing and recommendation, either from their wider professional community (TES, Pinterest), or from their closer network of colleagues (Facebook).
- Primary teachers are most likely to look at more visually appealing sites, which inspire them to be creative, especially for younger pupils. It is unsurprising therefore that Pinterest was the most popular site. This differs to the preferences of their secondary counterparts who use social media for subject-specific resources, geared towards a more mature audience.
- Finding resources via social media appeals to primary teachers, but they are suspicious of suppliers who use it to promote themselves, seeing this as an abuse of the 'social media ethos'.
- Links to free trial materials are well received. Teachers like to feel that they can trust the quality of a brand before investing in paid-for resources.
- When considering the future of social media, the emphasis is moving away from what is used, and towards how it is used. The growth of technology for both personal and professional means is inevitable, and as the next generation move through school, teachers now need to ensure that children are educated to use the internet safely and purposefully.

As a result of the research findings, each service has been organised to reflect its level of opportunity for commercial providers.

High opportunities

Pinterest: For professional use, Pinterest is a teachers' favourite. They like seeing the 'end product', whether it is a completed display, a model crafted by a child, or practical resources to transform a maths lesson. Commercial providers could 'pin' their resource; or examples of how it could be used to support other areas of the curriculum. Their 'pins' could also provide links to free downloadable materials and lesson ideas.

YouTube: The use of multimedia resources is popular amongst primary teachers, and many go directly to YouTube. Therefore, it is a suitable platform for commercial providers to upload videos which are geared especially for teachers, to launch a product and explain how it works. To overcome barriers such as school filtering systems, they should also consider making videos available on similar sites such as TES Teacher Videos. Providers should also consider joining specific channels on YouTube to make it easier for teachers to find their resources.

Medium opportunities

Twitter: Teachers are unlikely to use Twitter for finding resources so, like Facebook, commercial providers would be better placed using these services to raise their brand awareness. Teachers tend to follow famous Tweeters, such as authors, so are likely to take notice of any celebrity endorsements that are made about a product. Creating links to recent policy updates or current topics within education is another way to ensure that promotion is on the mark.

TES: Teachers use this site for two reasons: taking part in the discussion forums and downloading lesson ideas in the resource area. Commercial providers could have a presence in both parts of the website. They could build a rapport with teachers by responding to relevant posts in the forum, whilst also sharing sample resources. They should ensure, however, that they approach teachers to support them, rather than sell to them.

Low opportunities

Blogging: Although blogging is a growing phenomenon in primary schools, there is little scope for commercial providers to connect with teachers through this medium. This is because the whole appeal of blogging is that it is 'safe' and 'internal'. To open this up to a wider audience would undermine its school-based essence.

Facebook: Whilst Facebook is not widely used for professional purposes, teachers do take notice of relevant links that come through on their feed, particularly when they are 'liked' or 'shared' by a colleague. There isn't much scope for commercial providers to promote their resources on Facebook, so they should support teachers by developing communities for them to interact with peers and share resources.

Methodology

Schoolzone conducted an online focus group in October 2014. Nine participants were selected to attend, out of a total of 120 applicants from Schoolzone's registered teachers. They were invited on the basis that they currently use social media and are interested in its development, although their views on its place in education were mixed. The focus group was two hours in length, and was moderated by two Schoolzone researchers: Jenny Winstanley and Helen Burks.

Participant Profiling

A total of nine primary teachers from across the UK took part in the online focus group. A more detailed profile of each participant is below:

Christine: ICT co-ordinator and year 4 teacher at a Local Authority primary school in Cardiff, Wales. Uses a variety of social media platforms, and thinks they are good for promoting communication with other schools, as well as with fellow colleagues: *"I don't know what I would do if I didn't have other teachers to chat to or get advice from and it's due to social media that I can do this."*

Claire: Year 3 teacher at a Local Authority primary school in Falkirk, Scotland. Uses Pinterest and Facebook frequently for planning lessons, as well as 'Glow' – an online education platform used across Scotland. Feels that *"some sites are too loaded with marketing products."*

Lee: Year 6 teacher at a Local Authority primary school in Bedfordshire. Very interested in the technological side of social media, but feels that using these sites within school can be 'dangerous'.

Louise: Year 2 teacher and assistant head at a Local Authority primary school in Birmingham. Uses social media to network with colleagues and peers, although feels that those who choose not to use social media should not be excluded: *"I think that this should be used in conjunction with other methods for teachers that do not use social media - many in our school shy away from Facebook and Twitter."*

Matthew: Key stage 2 teacher at an Independent school in Cornwall. Uses social media in a professional capacity only, and believes that education publishers' or providers' use of social networking tools to engage teachers is a very effective strategy.

Michelle: Year 3 teacher at a Local Authority primary school in inner London. Is very wary about what she posts via social networking: *"Social media has no place in education and I am against it becoming the mainstream for professional communication."*

Murray: Year 6 teacher at a Free school near Glasgow, Scotland. Uses Twitter solely for education and research, and believes social media to be an effective strategy for publishers and resource providers to use, as it's "instant and easy to use."

Rachel: Deputy Headteacher and part-time Year 5 teacher at a voluntary-aided primary school in Somerset. Her pastoral work quite often involves dealing with social media and it's fall-out amongst pupils, and uses the school's Twitter account to promote the school blog to parents.

Sally: Year 3 teacher at an Academy primary school in County Durham. Enjoys using social media to network and share lesson ideas, as well as trialling new resources. She responded that social media is a good strategy for sharing resource ideas, as: *"It is useful as it makes ideas immediately accessible."*

Social Media Use

Which sites do teachers use professionally?

Teachers were asked to name the social media sites that they use in a professional capacity and describe how they use them. The discussion revealed a range of reasons why primary teachers use social media, and the benefits of using one platform over another to meet a particular need. On the whole, teachers use Twitter for updates on educational policy, YouTube for multimedia resources, Pinterest for display and crafts ideas, and Facebook for interacting with colleagues or looking at relevant educational posts.

Twitter

Keeping up-to-date:

One of the most appealing aspects of Twitter is that it provides teachers with current information. Teachers most frequently use the site for up-to-date news in education. This has been particularly pertinent in recent months given the vast changes made to curriculum and assessment arrangements. One teacher mentioned how Twitter helped them to understand the curriculum changes:

"When the new curriculum was announced, my Twitter PLN (professional learning network) opened up the bread crumb trail of research papers that had in fact informed the changes that were being proposed. This was very helpful in understanding the underlying theories that driving the change. This ignited professional thinking in staff."

In this respect, Twitter provides a way for teachers to 'eavesdrop' on policy level conversations, unfolding in real time, which they wouldn't otherwise have access to. Although just a small minority of senior leaders are likely to use it in this way, for these practitioners it is fairly empowering: even if they don't contribute the debate informing policy change, they can follow it.

Teachers felt that Twitter was a useful tool for connecting with experts and bridging the gap between themselves and policy-makers. They were less likely to use the site for keeping in touch with colleagues, as they preferred Facebook for this purpose. One teacher felt that Twitter had more "big names" than Facebook, and that it "seemed to be a bit more concise". This reveals that Twitter is used for interacting on a wider level, whereas Facebook is more commonly used within teachers' close community of friends and colleagues.

"I've used Twitter an awful lot...it's sort of more up to date and it can link to things so that's really good but Facebook definitely more social and more just within a social group around teaching."

Who do teachers follow?

Participants tended to follow gurus in the industry, such as Michael Rosen and Pie Corbett. It is likely that they chose to follow them because of their trusted, well-known and influential status. One teacher commented on the impact of these Twitter celebrities:

"Twitter is ahead of the curve. Many of the changes to OFSTED now are driven by opinion makers from amongst the twitterati"

Several also followed the DFE for their comments on policy, as well as TES for up-to-date news. One teacher who used Twitter with their class mentioned that they follow another class: "@giraffe class – a class of year 1 pupils". This reveals that whilst the site is mostly used for staying up-to-date with policy and change, a small proportion also use it for igniting children's learning:

"I have used Twitter with the class to promote a class blog. The posts have then been re-tweeted by some key educationalists and so the children's writing has received a really wide audience."

YouTube

Teachers are always looking for ways to excite and engage their pupils, and YouTube supports this by offering an initial stimulus to grab their attention. Teachers were positive about their use of the site with many commenting that they use it daily. They particularly liked the use of videos to inspire and engage their pupils, as this quote demonstrates:

"I use YouTube daily; the children in my school love the Pixar short movies which engage them for literacy lessons"

Teachers mentioned a range of ways that the site supports their teaching:

- Video clips to support lessons
- Class sing along songs and rhymes
- Music playlists for classroom management
- Uploading video recordings of children for project work
- Homework

The fact that teachers use the site for such a broad range of purposes indicates its wide appeal and flexibility for use across a range of age groups. One teacher felt that multimedia resources have the ability to capture the children beyond what the teacher alone could achieve:

"You get so much back and it can be controlled in a way that engages them, sometimes in a way that you might not be able to in a couple of minutes"

For teachers intending to use multimedia resources, YouTube is their immediate 'go to' website, most likely because of the vast range of resources the site offers. However, they felt that the diversity of the website could, at times, be a disadvantage. Most had to watch the videos beforehand to ensure the content was suitable, and in some instances, firewalls at school blocked the site altogether.

Whilst teachers liked the variety of content in YouTube, the fact that it is open to a global audience was its main disadvantage, particularly because anyone can upload and share their videos. Teachers didn't like the unreliability of the content and disliked the 'comments box' because they didn't trust what the children might be exposed to. Teachers tended to make their own judgements about whether to use a video rather than basing their choice on the recommendation of others.

"I'm always really worried the comments...when I put it on the screen making sure that it is full screen and stuff like that."

Pinterest

Teachers are always looking for new ideas and inspiration and participants felt that Pinterest supported this need. They liked the visual nature of the website, which helped them to instantly see how the resources would work in their own setting. Although most teachers associated the site with ideas for classroom displays or craft activities, one mentioned that they use it for a wider range of subjects, such as maths:

"I've got a very low ability maths group with year 3 and I need to visually engaging some of them as to number bonds and you can see straight away the kind of things you can use"

Previous Schoolzone research has found that primary teachers prefer to take ideas and adapt them for the needs of their own pupils. It is therefore unsurprising that teachers like Pinterest because they can pick and choose from the

aspects that they think will work in their own setting. One teacher summed up how Pinterest saves them the time and effort of trawling through websites for ideas and detailed planning, because they can quickly see the end product in picture form:

"It's all visual. I think it's just because it's all visual you don't need to look at all the websites... these pictures stimulate the whole idea and you don't need to go with the entire lesson that they've got set out on the original website."

Participants also commented on the fact that they could do a quick search and have ideas to use straight away. This complements the hectic lifestyle of the teacher, who often seeks to find inspiration in the evening for a lesson the following day.

"What I like about it is that within just a few seconds of looking at the entries you really have enough of an idea about how you might make it yourself."

The fact that teachers struggled to think of any disadvantages of Pinterest reveals that it successfully meets their needs. They are therefore unlikely to turn to other websites which offer inspiration and resource sharing more effectively. One teacher felt that the website might have too much of a key stage 1 focus, although this may also have been influenced by what this teacher had seen on the website so far. Nevertheless, it does indicate that the site has a very 'child like' appeal, which may not be so relevant to upper key stage 2 or secondary years.

Facebook

Facebook divides opinion and teachers use the site in very different ways. Some teachers predominantly use the site socially, but it weaves into their professional life because they are 'friends' with some colleagues. As a result, these teachers have occasional work-related discussions. They do, however, try and keep these to a minimum in order to maintain their work/life balance, as one teacher illustrated:

"its great for chatting to colleagues about things maybe forgotten to talk about in school, however, you run the risk of not 'switching off' from school if chatting about work on Facebook"

These teachers also tend to come across educational posts on their news feed opportunistically. Although they don't purposefully seek them out, they find themselves looking at education-related links which catch their eye.

"I occasionally read education posts on Facebook if friends have shared them but I would not seek these out actively and don't 'follow' any educational pages"

Although some teachers refrained from over-use of Facebook because they wanted to maintain a healthy work/life balance, others mentioned that seeing the posts during their down-time meant they had the time to explore them properly. This reveals that teachers tend to use Facebook during their personal time, and some do like having the opportunity to explore educational links further.

"There are also several sites who post on Facebook with links to ideas - for example teacher's pet. As this pops up on your feed during 'down time' it can be really helpful."

TES

Several teachers mentioned the TES site as a useful social networking site, both through its forums and resource downloading facility. Similar to Pinterest, teachers liked the idea of sharing and adapting resources from within their

own professional community. They also used the site for support and information about a broad range of topics. Teachers tended to use the forums for chatting with fellow teachers and asking questions anonymously.

"The TES forum is always good as an NQT for those niggly little worries that you have... I have been able to ask questions without "personalising" it in a school setting."

Social media access in schools



Teachers have a demanding work load and their time during the school day is focussed on the needs of the children. It is therefore unsurprising that the majority of teachers access social media sites outside working hours. Other barriers to using social media at school include:

- Sites blocked by the server
- Safeguarding children
- A negative professional image

One teacher mentioned that they often checked on their Facebook or Twitter apps during the day, and if there was something which looked interesting they would go back to read properly in their own time. This viewpoint is likely to account for the two-thirds of participants who mentioned that they look at the sites on the go using their smartphone. This sits in line with the findings for secondary teachers, who also keep their use of Facebook and Twitter for after school.

FIREWALLS

A frustration felt by many teachers is the fact that they simply cannot access their desired resources at school because of filtering systems put in place. This was particularly disappointing for teachers who had planned a lesson with a YouTube video and checked it at home, only to find that it was blocked on the school server.

Despite the fact that sites such as BBC don't offer the same breadth of resources as well as the function to upload or share their own videos, teachers sometimes turned to this site because it offered more reliability and accessibility than YouTube.

SAFEGUARDING

It is unsurprising that teachers are hesitant about using social media around children, given that the websites are accessed so widely in the public domain. In instances where teachers use the sites in the presence of children, such as YouTube, teachers will seek assurance that the resource is uploaded from a safe and reliable source.

SCHOOL POLICY

Some teachers felt that using social media during the school day would appear unprofessional, and one mentioned that it would be “frowned upon”. To overcome this, teachers have “strict guidelines regarding safe and appropriate use” but it is unsurprising that, combined with the demands of the school day, teachers prefer to keep their social media use to outside the school gates.

BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE

The BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) is a policy which is currently being introduced in some schools, in which pupils and teachers are encouraged to use their own tablets, or to rent them from the school. Whilst the benefits of BYOD include improved accessibility and school cost savings, concern was raised that teachers won’t have the same level of control over the content being accessed, meaning some pupils might have access to their personal social media accounts. Additionally, security settings and software can’t be monitored by the school to the same extent, so schools are recommended to have an IT policy in place.

Personal Vs Professional use

Differentiating between personal and professional use

The group were asked to consider how they differentiate between their personal and professional lives through social media.

Most agreed that it is important to create this distinction, although it is becoming increasingly harder to do so. Some of the group reported encountering issues with colleagues, who had become offended if their friend request is ignored, or those who choose to talk about work after the school day has finished, making it harder to switch off. One teacher explained that she finds it necessary to select carefully who she befriends on social media:

“I’m actually careful not to make contact with colleagues on Facebook besides those that have become close personal friends. I don’t want my personal life and work like entangled.”

However, social media is also a useful tool to communicate with colleagues, via private or group messaging:

“I find it easier to use social media to contact colleagues regarding planning etc, as I never seem to get a chance to catch up with staff during the school day.”

Networking amongst other teachers is a notable practice in order to share ‘Outstanding’ lessons or resources.

Teachers are also apprehensive about pupils or parents getting in contact, and make effort to avoid this happening. Most school policies advise teachers to have heightened security settings on their personal profiles, and to remove their surname, so that they aren’t searchable. One teacher said that the head teacher at her school really drills this into his staff, and promotes a ‘stay away’ approach where possible. On the other hand, a different teacher felt that this level of control was unnecessary, and that teachers should be able to make their own decisions when using social media:

“I think that’s kind of negating all professional your own sort of professional abilities really in the sense that you know we’re all capable of using things sensibly and wisely.”

"Lots of choice, and instant ideas of what to do."

"Easy to find – one search finds lots of relevant results"

"Looks like a feast!"

Pinterest is a popular tool amongst this group, with two thirds of the teachers reporting that they use it at least once a week, if not more. Teachers return to Pinterest again and again to help get their creative juices flowing: they use it for display ideas, to access free resources, and for arts and crafts examples. One teacher said that the site now includes a chat function, which she finds useful to share ideas.

When asked whether they thought Pinterest was a good way for charities and publishers to display their resources, teachers were slightly more hesitant, with most agreeing that they use online resources because of the fact that they are free. Teachers like the free resource ideas – this is a fundamental part of the Pinterest appeal.

There was a sense that Pinterest isn't really geared up for advertising, as one teacher explained:

"People seem to want instant gratification from Pinterest, so I think it would be hard for people to make money through it."

Another teacher responded that one of the problems with Pinterest lies in the continuous 're-pinning' of posts, meaning that the connected text can become less meaningful.

As well as this, teachers tend to like the concept of sharing between teachers within their own trusted virtual community.

"The thing that I'm not keen on is when you click on a link and it turns out that it's somebody selling something to teachers... it might be a hook to a company"

Twitter



This sample Tweet is taken from the Tyne and Wear Fire Rescue Service, who tagged a local school to promote their talk about the dangers associated with bonfire night.

One teacher responded that this was a useful way to promote a local service, and would prompt him to enquire further:

"It's a good way of raising awareness I suppose if you're following those people and it comes up, yes it would be something that I might click on and say oh I wondered can I get them into my school."

However, the teachers generally felt that whilst they do retweet posts that they think might be useful to communicate amongst their cluster, or to fellow colleagues, they are conscious about how easily posts can get lost in a busy Twitter feed:

"This is the problem with Twitter you see it's not tight enough and you've got tons of feeds coming in. That feed there would not entice me to re-tweet at all. If it had been something in Facebook with pictures or something I would re-share."

YouTube



This is an example taken from YouTube, of a video which might be used to teach the story of Guy Fawkes.

Teachers like short videos as an initial stimulus, to engage their pupils and ignite a theme or topic for the lesson.

Unsurprisingly, teachers are aware of the need to watch videos prior to showing them to their children. There is concern that inappropriate adverts or other videos might pop up along the sidebar, and so view the video in full screen where possible. However, it was suggested that this might be an opportune moment to demonstrate that inappropriate content does exist online, and how to deal with it.

When asked which features of a YouTube video they take into consideration, they responded that the number of views is not necessarily a determining factor. They said that the total duration is important, and one said that the text at the bottom is useful when exploring possible videos to use:

"I might read the little blurb that goes with it because if you're choosing it out of a list of ten that will say there about the same thing it might help you without having to watch them all, narrow it down a bit but then I'd have to watch it."

One teacher regarded YouTube to be an effective way for providers to launch and demonstrate their product to teachers:

"To search YouTube for a resource, and if I was searching for something with a mind to buy it, I would be more likely to look favourably at a publisher or a charity using YouTube to explain their products, I think that's quite positive use."

Search activity

Overwhelmingly, teachers are looking for free resources from social media sites above anything else, as illustrated in the poll below:



The group were asked to consider their search activity: do they search for resources or education updates actively, using specific search terms? Or is this process more opportunistic, by finding posts which 'pop-up' whilst online?

Generally, the teachers were in agreement that a current or relevant topic is more likely to be readily available, e.g. trending on Twitter, or the most recent addition on a Facebook page.

As well as relevant material, Primary teachers are attracted to visuals and pictures – something that will encourage them to take notice, and stop them from "flicking through and scrolling up".

This group were also more likely to be interested in something which their friends or colleagues may 'like' or 'follow', as this was seen to be a form of recommendation.

For one teacher, a unique idea which has been shared is what inspires him to explore something further. He explained why he believes that teachers sharing ideas amongst peers is such a valuable opportunity:

"I think then you stand a chance of seeing how other teachers are actually using resources or using ideas and generating new ideas from them. So you get real people testing new experiences of trying a lesson or using a resource that's very important."

How can publishers and resource providers use social media effectively to reach out to teachers?

Teachers appreciate that it is important for publishers, resource providers and charities to have a presence on social media. However, with ever-tightening school budgets, teachers want to feel like they are being offered something extra from these organisations, rather than just being given the hard sell. That 'added value' needs to be present, otherwise they won't hesitate to move onto the next provider.

As previously mentioned, teachers are more likely to access their social media accounts from home, or during their leisure time. This is most commonly because the school network doesn't allow access, as well as because teachers like

to differentiate between their personal and professional lives. As such, they are less likely to be looking to make purchases at this point, especially if they aren't the decision maker at the school.

Teachers like finding good quality, free resources online, which can be adapted and re-used in the classroom. If they find free resources which are particularly useful, they would be more inclined to purchase a package or programme from the same provider, with one teacher adding: *"I almost wouldn't mind paying because I've taken advantage of a lot of the free stuff."*

When discussing how formal the language used on social media should be to appeal to teachers, the group agreed that a good balance of being professional but authentic was ideal.

One teacher added that retaining a certain level of formality is valuable, especially for using social media for professional use:

"You can be polite without being over-familiar and I think there is a danger that people forget this as social networking becomes more ingrained in everyday life."

Social media in school

Communication with pupils

The group were adamant that interacting with their pupils via social media is not an appropriate method of communication. The terms and conditions when joining sites such as Facebook or Twitter state that the user must be at least thirteen years old to sign up. There was concern that some parents are not heeding to this rule, with one teacher explaining:

"We've done surveys or whatever, and said to the children 'Who has got Facebook?' and they'll put their hands up, and we'll say 'Do your parents know about it?' and they'll say 'Yeah, they helped me work out my date of birth so it would let me join'."

School blogs were considered by the teachers to be the only online forum in which they would communicate with their pupils outside school.

BLOGGING

Six teachers currently use school blogs. They named several online learning platforms which facilitate this interaction, such as Hwb¹, Fronter, MakeWaves, Jabble and School Jotter.

The rest of the group responded that whilst blogging isn't something that they currently use, they would certainly be interested in pursuing it in the future.

The group spoke very positively in regard to their experience of using blogs with their pupils. One deputy head and year 5 teacher spoke about the excitement which was generated amongst her class, when one of their blogs about 'Doctor Who' was retweeted and commented on by educationalists around the world, and even Matt Smith from the BBC programme. She added that she monitors all activity connected to the blog and Twitter:

"As class teacher, I act as gatekeeper so any comments have to be approved by me before the pupils can see them".

¹ A national collection of digital resources to support learning and teaching for learners aged 3 to 19 in Wales.

One teacher uses her class blog to develop the skill of writing for different audiences, to encourage parent engagement and for the children to display their work through an alternative medium. Blogging has also proven to be an effective peer assessment tool amongst pupils:

"They kind of said what was good about it, what you could improve next time and they've taken it on really sensibly and they really enjoy sort of commenting on it and they give really relevant points."

There are essentially three key security features linked to blogging via online learning platforms, which other social media platforms do not provide:

- All comments or posts must be approved by a teacher (sometimes the Headteacher) before they can be published
- There are no private messaging functions, meaning users cannot be anonymised
- The forum is password-protected, and can only be accessed by assigned members of the school – no content can be shared publicly

Whilst the teachers generally feel that a school blog is a safe and closely monitored social media environment, one teacher explained how this had also been a barrier, as his local council had prescribed too many rules with regard to content and restriction on access:

"They (the council) made it so restrictive that there was actually no audience who were going to be able to access it. So that's kind of fallen by the wayside."

It is important that the school blog is kept updated and receives plenty of contributions, to avoid it becoming stagnant and disengaging. To introduce the concept of the blog to the parents, one teacher's school held an ICT curriculum evening about e-safety, and presented the blog to parents that way.

E-SAFETY

Whilst the group agreed that social media interaction with primary pupils is not appropriate, they felt that there was a requirement to demonstrate the importance of using social media safely and securely.

For most, e-safety is an important part of the ICT / Computing curriculum, and is covered regularly. Generally, the view was that rather than demonstrating to children *how* to use social media, the vital message is to show them how to use it in a safe manner.

One KS2 teacher believed that because children are being increasingly exposed to social media online from a younger age, it is more difficult for them to establish where to draw the line:

"I think it should be referred to in e-safety lessons so children know what you should and shouldn't share - I think this is increasingly important as social media becomes more 'normal'"

Communication with parents

Some schools are beginning to use social media as a means of communicating with parents, for example via the school's Twitter account. One Deputy Headteacher reported that this method of engaging with parents had proven to be successful:

"Although it is in its infancy, it has had really positive results already. Parents also enjoy that look inside the classroom."

Twitter is predominantly used for reminders; for example, permission slips which need to be returned, or to highlight upcoming events such as school trips, and no confidential information or images can be shared. The school blog can also be promoted through this channel.

When in the process of implementing blogging, it's equally as important for teachers to reach the parents and gain their 'buy-in'. One teacher spoke of encouraging their children to actively comment on the blog as part of a homework task, and that they inform parents of this in newsletters or during parents evening.

One teacher explained that her school policy states that staff are not allowed to become 'friends' on social media with any pupils or parents in a personal capacity, so official school accounts are a good compromise.

Four teachers in the group were more wary about using social media to communicate with parents, and for their personal online presence, based on previous issues which they had encountered. Problems which were flagged up included parents posting inappropriate comments on the school Facebook page, making false allegations about members of staff, or sending direct messages to teachers. One teacher added that all social media users, whether it be parents, pupils or teachers, need to be mindful of the repercussions which might occur:

"Any kind of social media should come with a very large warning on the can. The smallest slips can become gross misconduct."



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