



St. Columba's College

Device, Social Media and Internet Acceptable Use Policy for Pupils

Reviewed December 2025. Next review date December 2026

Person Responsible for updating policy: Warden, Head of IT

Introduction

Social Media and the internet are amazing communication tools. They impact how we teach, learn, create, relax and how we interact with one another locally and globally. Sharing, testing and gathering ideas, information, insights, interpretation, analysis and opinions with and from friends, teachers, students, parents and the whole world was never so easy. These resources and tools can be very beneficial in education. The internet generally and Social Media in particular can be used effectively to enhance classroom practice, differentiate learning, introduce students to new research tools and communication skills, build virtual learning communities, encourage discovery of the entire world and to deliver the curriculum in innovative, active and engaging ways.

This policy should not be understood in isolation but in the context of the College Values, the College Rules, the College Anti-Bullying Policy and the College IT policies.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to guide the whole College community and promote partnership in providing and maintaining a safe place to learn in accordance with our mission and our values; to develop a culture of positive, helpful, truthful communication through all channels; to build a community, culture and relationships of mutual wellbeing, respect and responsibility among students, staff and parents; to raise awareness that any use of communication tools in a way that harms ourselves or others is unacceptable in our College community.

The policy aims to:

1. ensure that students will benefit from learning opportunities offered by the College's infrastructure, resources and internet access in a safe, secure and effective manner;
2. protect the integrity and good name of the College and each member of the College community from online harm;
3. provide direction on the importance of protecting privacy, intellectual property and confidential information;
4. outline behaviours which are unacceptable and the consequences of engaging in these behaviours;
5. provide and make staff, parents and students aware of procedures for investigating, noting and dealing with misconduct and infringement of school rules on unacceptable use of the internet and Social Media and of their responsibility as members of the school community to cooperate and partner in the application of these procedures;
6. outline procedures for students who find themselves the victims of inappropriate or unsolicited comments online.

There are online communities in which negativity is a cultural norm. There is scope for unconsidered, irresponsible and inappropriate use of Social Media. This can lead to othering, isolation, discrimination, bullying, harassment and other illegal activity. Excessive internet use has a negative impact on the academic, emotional, and social development of students and is an obstacle to students participating in the opportunities available to them for education and development at St. Columba's College.

Our policy has been developed to offer guidance, direction and a set of strategies to all students that will help them in the safe, constructive and responsible use of the internet and Social Media whether connected to school activity, as part of their education, or personally.

Scope

In the virtual world, the line between private and public is not well defined nor is the line between personal and school. Those lines will continue to grow more ambiguous and fluid. This policy applies to all online interactions both during and outside of normal school hours. It includes the use of school and personal devices; the use of school infrastructure to access school provided services and the internet; and the use of personal wifi access. It applies to the whole campus and off campus, in the boarding houses and whenever students are identified or identifiable as students of the College.

Definition

Definitions of Social Media and of devices are indicative and not exhaustive: technology develops constantly and at great speed with new communication tools and systems advancing every day.

Social Media includes web based sites and applications that allow people to interact with each other virtually. The term covers all social and professional networking platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn; blogs; video and audio podcasts; wikis; message boards and forums; instant messaging; photo, document and video sharing apps and websites such as YouTube, Snapchat, Dropbox, TikTok, WeChat, Weibo, VSCO and Instagram; chat apps like WhatsApp, iMessage, Google Hangouts; and micro blogging services such as Twitter, Tumblr, and online community forums like Facebook Groups.

Devices includes mobile phones, smartphones, ipads, smartwatches and any other equipment through which the internet or other virtual system may be accessed.

Roles and Responsibilities

- a. The Board of Management has approved this policy and will ensure its development, review and evaluation.
- b. The Head of IT, Head of Pastoral Care and the Head of Pupil Welfare will be responsible for the dissemination of the policy, investigation of any incident and the application of consequences.

- c. Teaching staff (including housemasters, housemistresses (HMs) and house tutors) will advise students on safe, secure device, internet and Social Media use and will arrange for unacceptable uses to be outlined.
- d. All staff will be alert to any signs or possibilities of online bullying.
- e. The College will organise courses and information sessions for parents on safe device, internet and Social Media use, as deemed necessary and appropriate.
- f. Strategies to ensure online safety will be taught as part of the SPHE and anti-bullying programmes.
- g. The College will provide follow-up and support for students who have been victims of online bullying in accordance with our Anti-Bullying Policy. The confidentiality of the students involved will be respected.
- h. Any student who observes or is involved in an incident of alleged or suspected online bullying will inform the HM of the student(s) concerned, or another member of the College staff, who will inform the appropriate members of staff. The College will thank the student and let the student know that the matter is being dealt with.

Safe and Responsible Use of Social Media

Together with Education & Prevention Strategies set out in the Anti-Bullying Policy, these are the College's strategies to maximise learning opportunities and reduce risks:

- Curriculum-based internet sessions in the classroom will be supervised.
- The College uses appropriate security solutions to minimise the risk of exposure to inappropriate material.
- The College uses virus protection systems on school-supplied equipment.
- Students and teachers will be provided with training in online privacy, security and safety.
- Use of school-provided internet access may be monitored by the College for unusual activity, security and/or network management reasons.
- Students will be taught about and be aware of copyright law, licensing agreements and intellectual property rights, and what is considered a violation of those rights.
- Students will treat others with respect at all times, on- and off-line.
- All students will be encouraged and given guidance on how to model respectful, kind, useful and true use of communication tools and note:

- **Once online, always online:** Consider carefully and be selective about what you share online, by email, text or voice message. Everything online happens in front of a vast, invisible, and often anonymous audience. Online communication is never entirely private. Once something is out there, it doesn't go away. Think of it as part of a permanent record. Remember that it can be copied, shared and forwarded easily and quickly. Everything leaves a digital footprint.
- **This is who you are:** Consider your own online identity, image, persona. How do you appear online? Does it reflect well on you today? Will it reflect well on you in the future?
- **This is St. Columba's:** Consider how anything you share online is likely to be perceived and whether it would be considered as linked to or associated with the College. Will it enhance or damage the good reputation of the College?
- Before you post anything or make any comment, like or unlike, or follow anything or anyone online, consider whether you would be comfortable if your intervention was displayed publicly where it could be seen by the whole school community.
- Be sure that any online communication with or about any member of the College community is appropriate, true and constructive.
- When using chat services, like WhatsApp or iMessage, only communicate with people you trust. Remember that other people may be able to view, copy and share all aspects of the communication. Consider each intervention: each like, comment, message, photo. **Is it kind, useful, true?**
- Consider carefully who you connect with or make friends with online. In general it is better to restrict friends to your peers and to those you know and trust in the real world.
- Do not reply to or get engaged in online arguments.
- Fact check material before you share it. Do not knowingly plagiarise material online. Give credit to the original author or creator or state that you do not know the source.
- All students will be encouraged and given guidance on how to consider carefully their online privacy and security:

- You should never post personal details such as your phone number, email address or home address, schedule, passwords or pin numbers.
 - You should never post private information about your life, experiences or relationships.
 - Be familiar with and use strict privacy settings. Review all of the options in your privacy settings. Default settings tend to keep information public until a user makes it private.
 - Consider blocking unwanted interactions that you receive on your Social Media interactions.
 - Report any aggressive or inappropriate behaviour directed at you online.
 - Protect your online identity and access: do not share your login credentials and passwords with anyone, even your close circle of friends.
 - If your profile is linked to your mobile phone, you should use the website's privacy settings to ensure that your phone number is not visible.
 - Report any accidental accessing of inappropriate materials immediately to school IT support or to a teacher, who will thank you and initiate the appropriate incident response.
- All students are required to comply with the St. Columba's College Digital Behaviour Code (link to Appendix C).
 - If you receive or become aware of any inappropriate use of Social Media by any member of the school community, or someone connected to the school community, tell someone. Such reports will be fully and confidentially investigated, the reported activity will be reviewed and, where appropriate, the content will be reported using the relevant reporting mechanism.
 - Take a screenshot of, keep and save any bullying materials you have been sent or in which you have been tagged or included and show them immediately to your HM or a teacher, who will deal with the matter in accordance with the Anti-Bullying Policy.

Educational Use of Social Media by Students:

1. The Internet can offer educational opportunities for collaboration on projects, presentation of ideas and sharing of class materials and resources.
2. Students will be given the opportunity to publish projects, artwork or school work on the internet with teacher approval. Students will continue to own the copyright on any of their published work.
3. Students will use school email accounts by permission only and in accordance with this policy.
4. At school and for school work students will only use software, apps, Social Media or other online communication forums that have been expressly approved by the school.
5. Any student who wants to use software, a Social Media site or app that has not previously been approved by the school for use at school must present a clear educational advantage of the use of the Social Media site or app in question, and seek express permission before use.
6. All students participating in online collaboration must pay strict attention to intellectual property and copyright laws.
7. Students are expected to exercise sound judgement while using Social Media at school or in connection with their school work.

Resource Reference

These links provide further resources to assist members of the School Community on the responsible use of the Internet and Social Media.

- <http://www.make-it-safe.net/>
- <http://www.webwise.ie/>
- <http://www.internetsafety.ie/website/ois/oisweb.nsf/page/safety-en>
- www.watchyourspace.ie
- www.thinkb4uclick.ie
- www.safekids.com

Unacceptable Uses of Internet and Social Media

Pupils are responsible for their own behaviour when communicating online and will be held accountable for how and what they communicate online.

Pupils may not:

- i. create groups online that are designed to exclude other classmates/students;
- ii. criticise other members of the College community online or in chat groups;
- iii. use school provided internet access for any purpose other than educational purposes or as approved for recreational use;
- iv. use digital storage media at school without a teacher's permission;
- v. fail to request permission to use school resources;
- vi. install software or apps on school machines without permission;
- vii. in school or during school activities, use software or apps which the school has not approved for use in school;
- viii. tamper with software on school equipment;
- ix. interfere with school ICT systems or attempt to bypass school restrictions;
Replace with the following:
- x. Deliberately attempt to circumvent the various College filters and the HEAnet filters. This includes the use of VPN tunnels;
- xi. interfere with school ICT systems or attempt to hack the school network.
Those doing so could be banned from access to the Network indefinitely and sanctions may be imposed.
- xii. intentionally access online sites, threads or conversations that contain obscene, pornographic, illegal, aggressive, degrading, discriminatory or otherwise objectionable materials;
- xiii. create, send, post, stream, forward, download, upload, like, follow or share discriminatory, defamatory, harassing, bullying, offensive, abusive, obscene, mean-spirited or threatening comments, material, content, messages, audio, videos or images in relation to any member of the school community;
- xiv. create, send, post, share, download, forward or like messages or material that might reasonably be considered to cause harm, offence or hurt, or to start or spread rumours;

- xv. impersonate any other person online; use their identity; login using any other person's credentials; create, send, post, stream, forward, download, upload, follow, like any content or do anything online in another person's name or in a way that is likely to be perceived as having been done by them or in their name;
- xvi. send, post, share, follow, forward or like messages or material that might reasonably be considered to have the potential to reflect badly on or damage the image or reputation of the school or that of a member of the College community;
- xvii. send, post, share or forward another person's personal and/or private information or property;
- xviii. create a Social Media profile that might reasonably be considered as associated with the school without the Principal's express permission;
- xix. create a fake or parody profile that impersonates the school or any member of the College community;
- xx. send, share or post material that is confidential to the school;
- xxi. stream films or videos during classes, other than with the express permission of a teacher for educational purposes;
- xxii. participate in the viewing or exchange of inappropriate or obscene text, images, audio or other material or content;
- xxiii. set up or contribute to a facility or thread for the purpose of or negligent as to the reasonable likelihood of it degrading, bullying or humiliating any member of the College community;
- xxiv. source or allow material to be sourced for the purpose of or negligent as to the reasonable likelihood of it degrading, bullying or humiliating any member of the College community;
- xxv. steal music or other media, or distribute them in a way that violates their licenses;
- xxvi. copy information into assignments and knowingly fail to acknowledge and cite the source;
- xxvii. fail to check material for plagiarism before sharing online.
- xxviii. Pupils who use an excessive amount of data for personal use could have their Internet Access blocked.

Follow-Up and Support

If a student is subject to alleged online bullying, the investigation and support processes set out on the school's Anti-Bullying Policy will be followed. Pupils are encouraged to speak to College staff about safety concerns on the Internet.

Sanctions for Policy Infringements

The College has the discretion to deal with each breach or alleged breach of this policy on an individual basis. The College and its Board of Management consider breaches of this policy to be very serious and will investigate such behaviour and take such disciplinary action as it deems appropriate in accordance with our College rules, College Values and, if relevant, our Anti-Bullying Policy, up to and including expulsion.

Sanctions may include but are not limited to:

- Internet access is considered a school resource and privilege. That privilege may be withdrawn from or suspended for any student who breaches this policy
- Confiscation of any mobile/smartphone or smart watch
- Notification to parents
- Detention
- Suspension from school and/or school-related activities
- Suspension pending an investigation
- Expulsion
- Legal action and/or prosecution

Any disciplinary sanctions are a private matter between the student being disciplined, his/her parents and the College. The College reserves the right to report any illegal activities to the appropriate authorities.

Appendix A

St. Columba's College Device, Social Media and Internet Acceptable Use Policy

Acceptance and Permission Form

Please review the attached school policy, sign and return this Acceptance and Permission form.

Name of Pupil: _____ Year: _____

Pupil

I have read and agree to follow St. Columba's College's Device, Social Media and Internet Acceptable Use Policy. By signing this agreement, I agree always to act in a manner that is respectful to myself and others, in a way that will represent the school in a positive way. In particular, I agree that I will always use the internet, Social Media and digital communication in a responsible, respectful, kind and constructive way and obey all the rules explained to me in this policy and by teachers or school staff from time to time. I accept that this policy applies in school and outside school. I understand that failing to follow this policy and the Code of Behaviour will lead to appropriate sanctions.

Pupil's Name (please print): _____

Pupil's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

St. Columba's College Device, Social Media and Internet Acceptable Use Policy

Acceptance and Permission Form

Please review the attached school policy, sign and return this Acceptance and Permission form.

Parent/Guardian

I have read St. Columba's College's Device, Social Media and Internet Acceptable Use Policy. I accept it and will support the school in implementing it.

I understand that every reasonable precaution has been taken by the College to provide for online safety but the College cannot be held responsible if pupils access unsuitable material online.

I have spoken with my child about his/her responsibility to use the internet, Social Media and all digital communication tools constructively, with respect for him/herself and others, with responsibility for him/herself and to others, with kindness, in a way that will represent the College in a positive way and in accordance with this policy and the College's Anti-Bullying Policy.

My son/daughter understands that he/she will need to think critically and carefully before acting online.

I consent to:

1. my child being given access to and accessing the internet at school;
2. access to and use of school-provided internet through any personal device my child uses in school or for school related work being monitored by the school from time to time for /his her security and safety;
3. any personal device through which my child in my care accesses school-provided internet being locked down by the school from time to time for security and safety;
4. apps and software being removed from any personal device that my child uses in school for school related work;
5. apps and software required for school work or for security being added to any personal device that my child in my care uses in school for school-related work.

Parent/Guardian's Name (please print): _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

St. Columba's College, Dublin – Digital Behaviour Code

1. Respect Myself

I will show respect for myself in all of my actions. When online, I will only use and support appropriate language and images. I will not post private personal information about my life, experiences or relationships.

2. Protect Myself

I will ensure that the information I post online will not put me at risk. I will not publish full contact details, a schedule of my activities or personal details online. I will report any aggressive or inappropriate behaviour directed at me. I will not share my login, password or account details with anyone else.

3. Respect Others

I will show respect to others in all of my actions. I will not use electronic media to demean, bully, harass or stalk other people. I will not visit sites that are degrading, pornographic, racist or that the school would deem inappropriate. I will not abuse my access privileges. I will not enter other people's private spaces or work areas. I will respect my peers and teachers by not using technology inappropriately in or out of class. I will not take any photos, audio or videos in school or on school tours.

4. Protect Others

I will protect others by reporting abuse. I will not forward or like anything the school would deem inappropriate.

5. Respect Copyright

I will request permission to use resources and suitably cite all use of websites, books, media etc. I will use and abide by the fair use rules. I will not install software on school machines without permission. I will not steal music or other media, and will not distribute these in a way that violates their licenses.

6. Respect Technology

I will take all reasonable precautions to protect my devices from damage. I will always keep my devices with me or in secure storage. I will not interfere with school ICT systems or attempt to bypass school restrictions. I will respect restrictions placed by the College on internet access.