

The Online School UK



Staff Communication and Conduct Policy 2026-2027

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1.Introduction

This policy sets out the standards of professional behaviour and communication expected of all staff working for The Online School UK (TOS). It aims to ensure that all interactions with students, parents, carers, colleagues and external professionals are professional, respectful and conducted in a manner that safeguards children and upholds the reputation of the school.

All staff have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Professional conduct, effective communication and appropriate boundaries are essential in creating a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment.

This policy should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Online Safety Policy, Acceptable Use Policy and all **current** safeguarding guidance, including *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)*.

The standards outlined in this policy apply to all staff, contractors, volunteers and any other adults working on behalf of The Online School UK.

2. Communication Principles

All communication should reflect the school's CARE values (Caring, Acceptance, Respect and Equality), safeguard the welfare of children, and maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times.

All staff are expected to communicate in a manner that is:

- **Professional** – using respectful, courteous and appropriate language at all times
- **Respectful** – recognising and valuing the dignity, diversity and opinions of others
- **Appropriate** – maintaining suitable professional boundaries, tone and subject matter
- **Child-centred** – acting in the best interests of students and prioritising their welfare in all communications
- **Timely** – responding within reasonable working hours and acknowledging communications where appropriate
- **Confidential** – protecting personal information and complying with UK GDPR and the school's Data Protection Policy
- **Honest and Transparent** – communicating openly and accurately while ensuring communication can be appropriately monitored where required

3. Communication Platforms

Staff must use approved school platforms for any communication with students, parents, or staff.

- **Slack** (internal communication between staff only)
- **Zoom** (for recorded meetings)
- **Google Meet** (for meetings between staff members)
- **TOS Email** (staff to parents/students)
- **Google Calendar** (lesson scheduling)
- **Google Drive** (learning materials and assignments)
- **GCSEPod** (homework and assessments)
- **In live lessons, via Big Blue Button** (including private chat with Happiness Managers and students)
- **TOS Message Board** (internal platform for teacher-student communication)
- **WhatsApp**. WhatsApp may only be used for emergency operational communication between members of staff (for example, where a teacher cannot access school systems immediately before a lesson). It must never be used to communicate with students or parents.

*Unapproved or personal messaging apps, SMS, disappearing messages or encryption, personal email addresses and social media DMs, must **not** be used for any school communication with parents and students, parents and teachers and teachers and students.*

4. Communication Hours

To promote a healthy work-life balance, staff are expected to:

- Communicate with students/parents **between 9:00am–5:00pm (Mon–Thurs)** primarily.
- Avoid sending/responding to messages outside of these hours **unless pre-arranged with the DSL**.
- Use scheduled messages if something needs to be sent outside of working hours.

Our Business Manager and Recruitment Officer also work Friday's. This means teachers, new members of staff or parents may communicate with or be communicated by, these members of staff, 9:00am- 5:00pm on Fridays. This is known by and approved by the Senior Leadership Team (either Headteacher, DSL or Business Manager) as it falls outside of primary working hours.

5. Staff Conduct and Professional Boundaries

Conduct

All staff are expected to model professional behaviour at all times and to act in a manner that safeguards children, promotes positive relationships and upholds the reputation of The Online School UK.

Staff must:

- Maintain professional boundaries with students, parents, carers and colleagues at all times.
- Communicate respectfully, professionally and appropriately in all forms of communication.
- Treat all members of the school community fairly and without discrimination, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.
- Act honestly, with integrity and in the best interests of students.
- Follow all safeguarding procedures and report any safeguarding concerns immediately in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Report any low-level concerns regarding the conduct of another adult in accordance with the school's Low-Level Concerns Policy.
- Protect confidential information and only share information on a legitimate need-to-know basis.
- Use only approved school communication platforms when communicating with students and parents.

Staff must not:

- Use sarcasm, offensive language or humour that could reasonably cause offence or be misunderstood.
- Engage in inappropriate, overly familiar or emotionally dependent relationships with students.
- Communicate with students using personal devices, personal email accounts, social media or unapproved messaging platforms.
- Share excessive personal information or seek emotional support from students.
- Discuss confidential information in inappropriate settings or with unauthorised individuals.
- Publicly undermine colleagues or the reputation of the school through any form of communication.

Professional Boundaries

Maintaining clear professional boundaries is essential to safeguarding children and protecting both students and staff.

Staff must:

- Maintain relationships with students that are professional at all times
- Ensure all communication with students takes place using approved school systems.
- Avoid sharing personal information that is not relevant to their professional role.
- Avoid becoming emotionally dependent on students or encouraging students to become emotionally dependent upon them.
- Never seek personal advice, emotional support or friendship from students.
- Ensure all one-to-one communication and support follows the school's safeguarding procedures.
- Maintain professional standards during online lessons, including appropriate language, dress and teaching environments.
- Report any situation where professional boundaries may have become blurred or could reasonably be perceived as inappropriate.

Staff must never:

- Ask students to keep secrets from parents, carers or the school. In addition, they won't promise to keep a secret for a student.
- Share personal contact details, including personal telephone numbers, email addresses or social media accounts.
- Arrange to meet students outside authorised school activities
- Show favouritism or provide preferential treatment to individual students outside legitimate educational or pastoral reasons.
- Exchange gifts, money or personal items with students

Misconduct

Examples of Misconduct

1. Safeguarding Violations

- Failing to report a high-level safeguarding concern (e.g. abuse disclosure, suicidal ideation)
- Breaching safeguarding confidentiality or disclosing student information without authorisation
- Inappropriate or unprofessional communication with a student (e.g. unmonitored private chats, flirty tone, late-night messaging)
- Behaviour suggestive of grooming, boundary-crossing, or inappropriate favouritism (see above examples)

2. Inappropriate Behaviour or Language

- Using offensive, discriminatory, or abusive language in any context
- Making derogatory or threatening remarks
- Showing visible aggression or losing composure in front of students
- Sharing personal, political, or religious views in a way that could be perceived as biased or coercive

3. Professional Negligence

- Failing to attend or cancelling lessons without reasonable notice
- Frequently arriving late or leaving early
- Appearing under the influence of substances while working
- Being unprepared or unprofessional in a way that impacts student learning

4. Data Protection & Privacy Breaches

- Sharing student data (e.g. grades, names, contact info) without permission
- Using school systems or student data for personal or external purposes
- Failing to secure logins, accounts, or systems, resulting in potential breaches

5. Breach of School Values or Ethics

- Publicly or privately undermining the school or its staff in a damaging or defamatory way
- Posting negative or inappropriate content about the school or students on social media
- Disregarding school policies (e.g. safeguarding, conduct, anti-bullying) even after being reminded/trained
- Behaving in ways that conflict with the school's values of kindness, inclusivity, and professionalism

6. Discrimination or Harassment

- Discriminating against students or staff based on race, gender, disability, religion, or other protected characteristics
- Making jokes, slurs, or inappropriate remarks about someone's background or identity
- Bullying, excluding, intimidating, or gossiping about colleagues, students, or parents
- Sexual harassment or comments that make others uncomfortable, even if intended humorously

Grooming, Boundary-Crossing and Inappropriate Favouritism

Any behaviour that creates an inappropriate relationship with a student, or could reasonably be perceived as doing so, will be treated as a safeguarding concern.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Offering gifts, money or personal rewards to individual students without authorisation.
- Giving one student excessive attention or preferential treatment without a legitimate educational reason.
- Engaging in emotionally intimate or overly personal conversations.
- Sharing personal problems or seeking emotional support from students.
- Sharing personal contact details, including mobile numbers, personal email addresses or social media accounts.
- Communicating with students through personal messaging apps, gaming platforms or social media.

- Accepting or sending friend or follow requests on personal social media accounts.
- Asking students to keep conversations or communications secret.
- Frequently arranging unnecessary one-to-one meetings or communications that are not recorded or monitored where required.
- Exchanging photographs, videos or personal media outside approved school systems.
- Making excessive personal compliments unrelated to learning or wellbeing.
- Creating a sense of exclusivity or making a student feel "special" in a manner unrelated to their education or welfare.

Staff should remember that even where no inappropriate intent exists, behaviour that could reasonably be perceived as crossing professional boundaries may still require investigation.

Social Media

Staff must:

- keep personal and professional accounts separate
- never accept current students as friends or followers
- never communicate with students via social media
- avoid posting content that could damage professional reputation
- not identify students online without permission
- report any inappropriate online contact from students to the DSL

This is something Ofsted often expects.

6. Confidentiality

Staff are entrusted with confidential information as part of their role and must ensure that all personal information relating to students, parents, carers and colleagues is handled lawfully, securely and sensitively.

Staff must:

- Treat all personal and sensitive information as confidential.
- Comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the school's Data Protection Policy.
- Only access information required to carry out their professional duties.
- Share confidential information only on a legitimate need-to-know basis or where required to safeguard a child.
- Store and dispose of confidential information securely using approved school systems.
- Report any actual or suspected data breach immediately to the appropriate member of SLT.

Staff must not:

- Discuss confidential matters in public places or with individuals who do not have a legitimate need to know.

- Share student, parent or staff information through personal email accounts, personal messaging applications or social media.
- Download, copy or retain confidential information for personal use.
- Use confidential information for personal, financial or external purposes.

Confidentiality must never prevent staff from reporting safeguarding concerns. Where there is a concern that a child may be at risk of harm, information should be shared promptly in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

7. Acceptable Use

The Online School UK relies on digital technology to deliver education safely and effectively. All staff are responsible for using school technology and communication systems professionally, securely and in accordance with safeguarding requirements.

This policy must be read alongside our Online Safety including Acceptable Use Policy and Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Staff must:

- Use only approved school platforms and systems when carrying out school business.
- Keep usernames, passwords and multi-factor authentication details secure.
- Lock devices when unattended and take reasonable steps to prevent unauthorised access.
- Ensure devices used for school work are appropriately secured with passwords, updates and antivirus software where applicable.
- Conduct online lessons using approved platforms and follow all safeguarding procedures.
- Ensure their teaching environment, dress and behaviour remain professional during online lessons and meetings.
- Report any suspected cyber security incident, phishing attempt, unauthorised access or technical breach immediately.
- Follow all school policies regarding lesson recordings, screen sharing and the storage of digital files.

Staff must not:

- Use personal email accounts or personal messaging applications to communicate with students or parents.
- Use unauthorised software or applications for school business.
- Record lessons, meetings or conversations unless authorised and in accordance with school policy.
- Share passwords or allow others to access their accounts.
- Download or transfer student information onto personal devices unless specifically authorised by the school.
- Use school systems for unlawful, discriminatory, offensive or inappropriate purposes.
- Input personally identifiable student information into artificial intelligence (AI) tools or external online services unless expressly approved by the school and compliant with UK GDPR.

Failure to comply with this section may result in disciplinary action and, where appropriate, referral to external agencies.

8. Breaches of Policy

Breaches of this policy will be taken seriously and managed in accordance with the school's Disciplinary and Grievance Policy and procedures, which can be found on the TOS policies section of our website. The action taken will depend on the nature, severity and frequency of the breach, together with any safeguarding implications.

Where appropriate, concerns may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Safeguarding concerns may also require referral to external agencies such as the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Children's Social Care, the Police, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), the Teaching Regulation Agency (where applicable), or any other relevant regulatory body. The DSL takes charge in referrals to external agencies in these matters.

Nothing within this policy prevents an immediate referral to safeguarding agencies where there is reason to believe a child may be at risk of harm.

Disciplinary Actions

1. Informal Action (for minor or first-time breaches)

This stage is intended for low-level and often unintentional issues.

Examples may include:

- *Inadvertent rudeness or inappropriate language*
- *Minor breaches in professional tone*
- *Using the wrong platform to communicate*
- *Communicating outside of reasonable work hours*

Actions:

- Verbal warning/reminder
- Coaching or mentoring
- Reissue of this policy

2. Formal Action (for repeated minor issues or more serious breaches):

This stage is suitable for recurring problems or moderate concerns.

Examples may include:

- *Communication that makes either party feel uncomfortable due to word choice*
- *Appropriate communication boundaries being pushed*
- *Consistent messages to the point of harassment*
- *Communication without students on an unapproved platform without DSL knowledge and parental consent*

Actions:

- Written warning (with follow-up period)
- Mandatory training (e.g. safeguarding, communication)

3. Escalated Action (for repeated behaviour breaches):

This stage addresses conduct that is persistent and therefore causing damage.

Examples may include:

- *Persistent breaches and non-compliance after formal action has taken place*
- *Intentional unsafe use of communication such as bullying, harassment or discrimination, via any of our approved communication methods*
- *Any of the above Disciplinary Actions from section 1 or 2, repeated and therefore causing damage*

Actions:

- Final written warning
- Temporary suspension (pending investigation)
- Dismissal/termination

4. Immediate Dismissal pending investigation (for one off serious breaches or persistent behaviour):

This stage addresses conduct that is or has the intent to cause harm to a student or colleague.

Examples may include:

- *Intentional unsafe use of communication such as bullying, harassment or discrimination, via any of our approved communication methods*
- *Intent to cause harm physically, emotionally, mentally or sexually to the recipient*
- *Any illegal behaviour e.g. using sexual language, request of exchanging inappropriate media, grooming, coercion*

Actions:

- Immediate Dismissal without warning

- SLT investigation

- Termination

Disciplinary actions 1-4 will be carried out by a member of SLT.

5. Additional Measures (as appropriate):

- Referral to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

- Reporting to external authorities (e.g., LADO, police, regulatory bodies)

9. Whistleblowing and Reporting Allegations against Staff

Whistleblowing

The Online School UK is committed to maintaining a culture of openness, transparency and accountability. All staff have a professional duty to raise concerns where they believe that poor practice, misconduct, unlawful activity or safeguarding failures may place a child or others at risk.

Staff should report concerns promptly through the appropriate channels and will not suffer detriment for raising genuine concerns in good faith.

Concerns relating to the Headteacher, CEO or Director should be reported directly to the appropriate senior leader or governing body (where applicable). Nothing in this policy prevents a member of staff from reporting concerns directly to external safeguarding agencies, Children's Social Care, the Police or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where appropriate.

Low-Level Concerns

A low-level concern is any behaviour by an adult working with children that is inconsistent with the Staff Code of Conduct but does not meet the threshold for an allegation of harm.

Examples may include:

- Using language that could be considered unprofessional.
- Failing to maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- Becoming overly familiar with a student.
- Communicating outside approved procedures.
- Any conduct that causes another member of staff to feel uneasy or question whether professional boundaries have been maintained.

All low-level concerns, no matter how small, should be reported promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Headteacher. Concerns will be recorded, reviewed and managed fairly and proportionately in accordance with the school's Low-Level Concerns Policy.

Allegations Against Staff

Any allegation that a member of staff has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed, or may have harmed, a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children,

must be reported immediately to the Headteacher or, where appropriate, the CEO or Director.

The school will manage all allegations in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), seeking advice from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where required.

All allegations will be handled fairly, confidentially and without delay, ensuring the welfare of children remains the paramount consideration throughout the process.

This section should be read alongside the schools Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Whistleblowing Section for further advice, methods of escalation and Whistleblowing Forms.

9. Review and Acknowledgement

All staff must read and acknowledge this policy annually in line with safeguarding training of which a written record will be kept by the DSL.

It will be reviewed at the start of each academic year or as required.