

Orchard Community Primary School



Policy & Code of Conduct for the acceptable use of Class/Year Parental WhatsApp Groups

Version	Date	Author	Reason for Change
0.1	March 2024	FS	New Policy
0.2	April 2026	FS	Updated

Review Frequency	Next Review Date
Every two years or as required	April 2028

Approved by: Governing Body – Autumn 2026

Policy and Code of Conduct for the acceptable use of Class/Year Parental WhatsApp Groups

1. Purpose

This policy sets out Orchard Primary School's expectations regarding the use of parent/carer WhatsApp groups and other informal social media platforms where school-related matters are discussed. Its purpose is to safeguard staff wellbeing, protect the reputation of individuals and the school, and ensure that communication within the school community remains respectful, lawful, and constructive.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all parents and carers of pupils at Orchard Primary School. While WhatsApp groups are typically organised independently by parents, conduct within these groups can directly impact the school, its staff, and its wider community.

3. Guiding Principles

Orchard Primary School is committed to:

- Maintaining a respectful and supportive school community
 - Protecting staff from harassment, abuse, and reputational harm
 - Promoting appropriate and constructive channels of communication
 - Ensuring that all members of the community act within the law
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4. Acceptable Use

Parents/carers are encouraged to use WhatsApp groups for:

- Sharing general information (e.g. reminders about events, homework queries)
 - Offering peer support in a respectful and constructive manner
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5. Unacceptable Conduct

The following behaviours are not acceptable under any circumstances:

- Posting abusive, defamatory, or derogatory comments about staff, pupils, or other parents
- Making personal comments or open criticism about staff, pupils or other parents or any member of the school community
- Making unsubstantiated allegations or spreading misinformation
- Targeting individual members of staff or questioning their professional integrity in a public forum
- Sharing confidential or sensitive information about staff or pupils
- Posting comments which bring the school into disrepute
- Using social media to publicly challenge school policies or discuss issues about individual children

- Displays of anger including swearing, or using offensive language
- Encouraging others to engage in negative or harmful commentary

Such actions may constitute harassment or libel and may result in formal intervention.

6. Reporting Concerns

Parents and carers with concerns about the school or its staff must:

1. Raise the issue directly with the class teacher in the first instance
2. Escalate to a member of the Senior Leadership Team if unresolved
3. Follow the school's formal complaints procedure where necessary

WhatsApp groups must not be used as a substitute for formal communication channels.

If you are concerned about inappropriate comments on a class/year WhatsApp group, in confidence, please contact our Senior Leadership Team by emailing the school on school@orchard.leics.sch.uk

7. Process for Addressing Incidents

Where the school becomes aware of inappropriate or abusive conduct on WhatsApp or similar platforms, the following staged response will be followed:

Stage 1: Informal Intervention

- The Headteacher (or delegated senior leader) will contact the individual(s) involved
- Concerns will be outlined and expectations for conduct reinforced
- A request will be made for inappropriate content to be removed
- A cautionary letter will be circulated to the school community in order to remind parents/carers about the appropriate use of WhatsApp
- If a parent/carer's behaviour on a WhatsApp group breaches this policy and code of conduct, it is the prerogative of that group's moderator/s to remove the parent from the group.

Stage 2: Formal Warning

- A written warning will be issued where behaviour persists or is serious in nature
- The warning will clearly state the breach of policy and expected changes in behaviour
- A record will be kept on file

Stage 3: Escalation

- Where behaviour continues or is deemed severe, the school may:
 - Restrict the individual's access to school premises (in line with school policies)
 - Require all communication to be conducted through formal channels only
 - Involve the Governing Body or Trust leadership

Stage 4: Formal Action

- In cases involving serious defamation, harassment, or reputational harm, the school reserves the right to:
 - Seek legal advice and pursue action where appropriate

- Report matters to external agencies (e.g. police) if thresholds are met
 - Issue formal notices regarding conduct
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8. Legal Considerations

Parents/carers should be aware that:

- Written statements published in WhatsApp groups may constitute **libel** if they are false and damage a person's reputation
 - Individuals may be held personally liable for such statements
 - The school has a duty of care to staff and may act to protect them from harm, including reputational damage
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9. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Headteacher:** Overall responsibility for implementing this policy and safeguarding staff welfare
 - **Senior Leaders:** Support in monitoring, investigating, and addressing incidents
 - **Governors/Trust:** Oversight and support in cases requiring escalation
 - **Parents/Carers:** Responsibility for adhering to this policy and maintaining respectful communication
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10. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or in response to significant incidents or changes in guidance.

11. Conclusion

Orchard Primary School values strong, positive relationships with parents and carers. Open communication is essential, but it must always be conducted with respect, integrity, and accountability. Any behaviour that undermines these principles will be addressed promptly and robustly.

APPENDIX 1 - Code of Conduct for parents/carers

In order to prevent any offense or upset, we ask that everyone using WhatsApp groups within our school community read and follow the notes and guidelines listed below:

- The group should never be used as a platform to air views/grievances regarding a member of staff, child or parent in the class or school;
- Messages posted on the WhatsApp Year Groups should be supportive and respectful of all other group users;
- The group is not a political platform for airing opinions on current affairs;
- The group should not be used for private conversations with anyone else using the group;
- The group should be used keeping in mind mutual respect and cultural sensitivity between all its members;
- Each group should have a parent/carer moderator who is responsible for monitoring posts in order to oversee and ensure appropriate use; however, please be aware that any parent administering Class or Year WhatsApp groups are likely to qualify as 'data controllers' and could therefore have legal responsibility, and potential legal liability, for managing personal data shared within these groups.
- Links to other online information posted in WhatsApp messages should only be made to sites which are relevant to school, education or extra-curricular activities. Links and other requests should not be posted if they relate to commercial services, unrelated campaigns or personal appeals.
- No one is under an obligation to chat or respond to questions posed.
- Some group members may message you directly. There is no obligation to answer. If this direct personal approach does not suit you, please let the individual know.
- If another parent considers a message inappropriate they should contact the person who posted it and seek removal of the message if desired.

We anticipate parents, carers and other visitors to:

- Respect the ethos, vision and values of our school;
- Work together with staff in the best interests of our pupils;
- Treat all members of the school community with respect – setting a good example with speech and behaviour;
- Seek a peaceful solution to all issues;
- Approach the right member of school staff to help resolve any issues of concern.

Please note, the school considers the following WhatsApp activity inappropriate:

- Abusive, personal comments or open criticism about staff, pupils or other parents or any member of the school community;
- Displays of anger including swearing, or using offensive language;
- Bringing the school into disrepute;
- Posting aggressive, defamatory or libellous comments;
- Using social media to publicly challenge school policies or discuss issues about individual children.

To avoid uncomfortable or unpleasant situations for other group users, parents/carers are therefore politely asked to consider the nature of their WhatsApp post carefully as any opinions expressed are the opinions of individual members and may not be representative of the whole group.