

Stay safe in cyberspace

March 14, 2020

The Department of Education's Social Media Policy and Social Media Policy Implementation Procedures outline the employer's expectations as well as how teachers can use social media while staying within the expectations as departmental employees. Teachers should read these, particularly the latter, very carefully. These expectations are also set out in the Department's Code of Conduct. It is important that members ensure they are aware of not only the Department's expectations but also general warnings about the potential pitfalls for teachers in using social media in their professional and private lives.

Here are some of the most frequently asked questions fielded by Federation.

A parent has contacted me via social media, what is Federation's advice?

When you are communicating with parents and community members in your role as a teacher, you should be aware you are representing the Department and must be professional in your communication. When communicating with friends who are also parents and community members, be aware that according to the Department the Code of Conduct is a 24/7 document. So, it would be inadvisable to discuss issues such as student behaviour, performance, assessment or other professional matters with parents via your personal social media accounts.



The Department encourages teachers to communicate online with their students, what is Federation's advice?

All electronic communication with students must be of a professional nature and be conducted on platforms that are within the Department's portal system. This does not restrict communication to email as there are other platforms available, hosted within the Department's portal. Consideration, however, should be given to workload and members should seek further advice from their organiser in relation to that.

Can the Department's Employee Performance and Conduct (EPAC) Directorate access teachers' social media posts?

Yes. Once information is on any social media platform, it is public information. As soon as you post it, you've lost control of it. For example, when a friend tags you in a photo, all the friends of all the people in that photo can see it. Parents and students can download and print any posts that have been made and the police have the right to forensically search computers and servers. Teachers have received allegations from EPAC based on Facebook print-outs, Twitter feeds, emails and other social media.

What should teachers do if students ask to be their "friend"? Reject their request?

It's simple — you should not have students as friends.

Further advice in relation to social media and electronic communication can be found on Federation's website.

For assistance/advice regarding your employment, phone Federation's Professional Support section on 1300 654 369.