



Reduce and manage social media complaints: a guide

Have you ignored poor pupil behaviour recently to avoid social media complaints? You won't be alone: Teacher Tapp found a quarter of secondary school teachers and 30% of primary teachers have done this.¹

Meanwhile, 57% of ASCL members report having experienced hostile or defamatory comments from parents on social media in the past year.²

This guide is for school leaders and senior staff. It offers practical steps to help reduce the risk of social media complaints and to respond effectively when they do arise.

Preventing social media complaints

1. Do parents and carers know what to do if they have a concern or complaint?

If parents know what to do if they have a concern, and believe it will be acted on, they're less likely to take to social media in the first instance.

- Is your complaints policy easily accessible? Is the process easily understood?
- Do parents understand that they can raise concerns informally first, and which staff member to go to?
- Does your setting have a listening culture? Is feedback welcomed? Check out [Building positive parent partnerships](#) for tips and this DfE case study of a school which has [reduced complaints through a focus on building relationships](#).

Parentkind, in partnership with the DfE and Ofsted, have produced [guidance for parents around ways to resolve concerns](#). Highlight this useful guidance to parents and encourage them to follow the recommended steps.

Citizens Advice have advice on [Sorting out school problems](#) which outlines a graduated process in straightforward terms – another useful resource for sharing.

Advise parents to keep a note of events at every stage. Try to work with them, not against them. If the matter is unresolved, it can be escalated to the LA or trust. Exceptionally, a complaint may be escalated to the DfE, but they are concerned with the process, not the complaint.

¹ [Teacher Tapp Insights: Home-school relationships](#)

² [ASCL survey reveals the impact of parental behaviour on wellbeing of school leaders](#)



2. Do people know what is and isn't acceptable online, and why?

Online abuse by parents and pupils can happen on any digital communications platform, including social networks, texts and messaging apps, email and private messaging. Staff may also suffer further harm when abusive content is recorded, uploaded or shared by others online.

- Do you have written guidelines around acceptable and unacceptable online conduct? For example, in a social media policy, acceptable use policy or code of conduct? Is this information regularly shared and updated?
- Are members of your community aware of the impact of hurtful or defamatory comments online? Do they appreciate the negative impact on individuals, as well as the wider impact on reputation?

Talking about school staff or institutions on social media is unhelpful because it often damages professional reputations, erodes trust in the educational community, and can escalate minor issues into public, long-lasting conflicts.

Public complaints rarely resolve underlying problems, create hostile environments, and can lead to legal or disciplinary action.

3. Be proactive in your communications

- Is information about what's going on at school accessible and shared? For example, via a regular newsletter or the school website?
- Have you collaborated with parents on their preferred forms and amounts of communication? Reams of repeated messages will put people off reading anything; too little information and people are out of the loop.

Keep in mind that change makes people nervous. If parents hear about proposed changes or developments by rumour and gossip, they are more likely to jump to the worst-case scenario and then take to social media to vent. If they hear about things firsthand, the risk of this is significantly reduced.

If there is a change going on at school, think carefully about who needs to know, what they need to know, and when they need to know it. Make sure people know who to come and talk to if they do have a concern. This reduces the likelihood of their taking to social media to complain about it!

Managing social media complaints

What can you do if someone makes negative or defamatory comments online or in a digital space? Aim to act promptly, document your actions, and seek resolution directly where possible.



1. Removal and response

Aim to get the abusive content removed and initiate a direct conversation to resolve any issues. There are different steps you can take, depending on the seriousness of the situation and threats posed.

Address complaints directly and privately wherever possible.

Be mindful that the school's duty of care towards staff extends to private messaging platforms. Defamatory or malicious comments made in **WhatsApp groups** fall within the scope of your safeguarding responsibilities and should be treated with the same seriousness as public posts.

Don't ignore complaints hoping they will go away. Unaddressed complaints tend to escalate. Even a brief acknowledgement that a concern has been received can help de-escalate situations.

Keep a record. Throughout any complaint, school leaders should document their own actions carefully – dates, communications sent and received, and steps taken. This is important both for legal protection and for any subsequent review. Take screenshots of offensive posts before requesting removal, as content can be deleted quickly.

- **Request removal:** Start by asking the author to remove the content. Explain why it is not helpful and discuss how the matter could be resolved.
- **Report to platform:** Does the content violate the website's community standards? Report the content to the social media platforms.
- **Warn:** Send a formal warning letter requesting the removal of the material. Explain how it violates your school policy or code of conduct.
- **Ban:** If comments threaten the safety or wellbeing of members of the school community, parents could be banned from the school premises for abusive online behaviour. Ensure correct procedures are followed.
- **Legal action:** take legal advice for defamation (libel) if the posts damage the reputation of the school or staff.
- **Police involvement:** if posts contain threats of violence, hate speech, or harassment (potentially violating the [Online Safety Act 2023](#)), the police may be contacted.

See also suggestions from lawyers Schofield Sweeney: [The impact of social media on your school/academy](#).

2. Support for staff members

All employers have a legal responsibility to tackle all forms of bullying and harassment of a discriminatory nature. For that reason, both support and training need to be available.



- Check with your colleagues – what support do they need, when and how much? Make sure you are checking in with colleagues who have been the subject of a complaint and consider their wellbeing.
- Is there a need for further training? When asked by Teacher Tapp, 74% of teaching staff said that they have never received training on communicating with parents.³

Remember that Education Support is dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff. Call **08000 562 561** for immediate, confidential emotional support, or visit educationsupport.org.uk.

3. Keep your governors and trustees in the loop

When complaints escalate, it is important to involve governors correctly – both to fulfil legal requirements and to ensure good governance. Understanding their role helps you manage the process confidently.

- **Strategic oversight:** governors are meant to monitor the effectiveness of the complaint procedure, not investigate individual cases.
- **When they get involved:** they are involved in formal complaints if the headteacher cannot resolve the matter, or if the complaint is directly against the headteacher.
- **The chair of governors** may be involved in the early stages of a complaint against the headteacher or in handling sensitive, high-level issues.
- **Impartiality:** if a complaint reaches a hearing stage, an impartial panel of governors must be appointed to consider the complaint.
- **Confidentiality:** governors must treat complaint documentation as confidential and avoid discussing individual cases publicly or with other staff.

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³ [Parent complaints special - Teacher Tapp](#)