Managing parent-administered Facebook groups

Social media is an excellent platform for parents and carers to share and keep up to date with news, activities and events happening at your school. Your school may already have an official Facebook page to notify the community of events and important announcements.

Some parents have created Facebook pages for smaller parent discussion groups which include parents of students in the same class, year level or even entire school. They can be a positive way to socialise with other parents. However, in some instances content may be posted which is potentially harmful to the reputation and wellbeing of the school or a staff member mentioned.

The Department of Education suggests parents follow these tips and strategies when creating and administrating these pages and groups.

What to name the group

When it comes to naming your group, it is best to stay away from exclusively using the school's name, as this may cause confusion within the school community. You should also make the purpose of the group clear, whether it is a group for the parents and guardians of students, past students, or a grade specific group. For example, 'My School parents and guardians school info group'. It is also important to avoid using the school logo as the profile picture for the group.

Who are the administrators

When creating a group you will be the administrator. As your group grows, your page may require more attention and you may decide to add more admins. Once you make a group member an admin, they will be able to add or remove group members or other admins, and edit the group description and settings. You should only add a member as an admin if you know and trust them.

Keep the page positive

Tell your school

It is best that you talk to your school and let them know that you are creating a Facebook page for the community. A short statement should also be posted that indicates the page is not an official school communication channel and does not represent the school, and that any statements and opinions made on the page are not made on behalf of the school.

Be vigilant and monitor your page

If you encounter negative, derogatory or inappropriate content posted on your page, take the following steps to help resolve the issue quickly and efficiently.

- Refrain from responding.
- Take a screen shot or print a copy of the concerning content.
- Block the offending user from the group.
- Report the content to Facebook.
- Delete the concerning content from the page.
- Consider informing the school principal.

Before you post something online, ask yourself if the community or school really need to know this. Is it relevant? Helpful? Positive? Remember the aim of a parent-run Facebook group is to connect people and share school news and upcoming event information. Be a good role model online.

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Avoid naming staff and students

It is important to consider the privacy of school staff and students. Some people may not wish to have the whereabouts of themselves or their children visible online. By naming staff and students, you could reveal this information to the public, and may place their safety at risk.

What photos are appropriate

When you're posting images on the page, it is important to consider who might be in the background, and how the photo portrays the school. You might be happy uploading and sharing a photo of your child, but if the photo contains other children it is important to check with their parent or guardian before uploading the photo. The same goes for tagging and naming people in photographs, comments and status updates.

Raising complaints on Facebook

The appropriate way to raise complaints or concerns you may have about the school or its staff is to discuss it directly with the school's principal. If you remain dissatisfied after talking to the principal, you can talk to the regional office. Raising concerns or complaints on social media does not guarantee the school will be made aware of it.

Consider potential consequences

Be mindful of the potential harm you may cause to the reputation and personal wellbeing of school staff members or other people mentioned on the page. Inappropriate online content may constitute a criminal offence and become a police matter. For example, online content may substantiate the offence of 'using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence' (*Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)* s.474.1). Defamatory content may give rise to litigation under the *Defamation Act 2005 (Qld)*. School staff may contact their union or obtain personal legal advice if they feel that online content seriously impacts their reputation.

Facebook community standards

There are standards associated with having a group on Facebook, and it is important to ensure that all administrators have read and understood Facebook's terms of service. If something is posted on your group and it is reported as breaching Facebook's community standards, the post or image may be removed or worst case the group could be disabled.

https://www.facebook.com/legal/terms

https://facebook.com/communitystandards

Resources

https://www.facebook.com/help/

http://behaviour.education.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/cybersafety/social-media-and-community-online.pdf