



*Founded 1922*

**HERSCHEL  
GIRLS SCHOOL**

## **HERSCHEL GIRLS SCHOOL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY: PARENTS/GUARDIANS/PUPILS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

Herschel Girls School (“**the school**”) recognises that social media is a very valuable tool for both communication and education. We want all pupils and their parents/guardians to gain every benefit from the opportunities it offers.

If not used responsibly, social media poses certain risks. The school has a duty to protect itself, and other individuals associated with the school, against these risks. This policy has therefore been created to encourage the use of social media, whilst at the same time reducing the risks to your daughter, individuals associated with the school and the school’s reputation.

At Herschel, we foster an open and expressive environment, and respect every individual’s right to freedom of speech. However, as an educational institution, we feel we must remind all pupils and parents of their obligations as citizens of South Africa, to ensure that all communications on social media are lawful, do not cause harm and do not infringe on other peoples’ rights (e.g. their rights to reputation, dignity and privacy). Sometimes this may mean that your right to freedom of speech is limited. This is not a limit imposed by the school, but by South Africa’s Constitution.

**This policy applies to all parents/guardians of pupils and all pupils at the school and to social media used in both a personal capacity as well as in relation to/association with the school.**

## **2. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

For purposes of this policy, “social media” means any facility that enables conversation over the internet including but not limited to, blogs, forums, platforms such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Live.ly, Music.ly, WhatsApp, YouTube, Gaming platforms (including games on X-box and PlayStation etc.) and any other forms of communication now and in the future classified or generally regarded as social media.

## **3. IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES**

The following are important principles that pupils and their parents/guardians must keep in mind when using social media:

- 3.1 Most individuals, whether pupils or parents can be linked with the school, even if they do not list Herschel Girls School as their school or the school their child attends.** This is due to assumptions that can be made from viewing an individual’s social media platforms (e.g. most of their friends attend the school, so it is likely that the individual in question attends the school) or assumptions that can be made from viewing content regarding the individual on another social media platform (e.g. being “tagged” in a school photograph by a friend or by the school). This means that these social media guidelines and other applicable policies, apply 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (including school holidays), as all individuals associated with the school act as representatives of the school at all times.
  
- 3.2 “Digital content is dangerous content”** – as soon as content exists in a digital format (i.e. as a photo, or typed note), it is at risk of being distributed and seen by many other people. Even if content is not posted online, phones are stolen every day, images are backed up to the Cloud (which may get hacked) and screenshots can be taken. As a result of this, all digital content is vulnerable, and content that is sent to someone else or posted, is especially vulnerable, and is essentially out of the creator’s control.

- 3.3 Content on social media is “published” content** – as soon as one other person has seen your content on social media (and WhatsApp is a form of social media), in the eyes of the law, that content is regarded as “published” content. This means that you are responsible for it, just as the journalist who puts the headline on the front page of the newspaper.
- 3.4 It is a permanent record** – everything you put online is there to stay. Even if the content is deleted shortly after it is posted online, screenshots facilitate widespread distribution of content that is beyond your own control.
- 3.5 You are never anonymous online** – even if you use social media under a pseudonym, it is easy to trace the identity and location of an account holder using an IP address.
- 3.6 It is not private** – there really is no such thing as “private” on social media. Be very careful with posting any personal information that you would not want the public to see. Be particularly mindful of sharing information such as full dates of birth and current locations.
- 3.7 Chain of publication** – remember that even if you did not create the content, in terms of the law, **you are responsible for any content that you retweet, share, like or are tagged in on social media. Any comments appearing on your posts are also your responsibility, and if you are in a WhatsApp Group all of the content on that group is your responsibility** (not just the responsibility of the person who put it there).
- 3.8 WhatsApp Groups** – any content on a WhatsApp Group is just as much your responsibility as the responsibility of the person who put it on there/created it. In a situation where the content on the group becomes inappropriate in any way, you have two options:
- 3.8.1** Leave the group immediately to leave the chain of publication; or
- 3.8.2** Document that you disapprove of the content (for example, by saying in the group “I do not condone this type of content), and that you want to remove your association with it.

If you fail to take either of the options listed above, you are choosing to remain in the chain of publication and will be considered as responsible and liable, as the person who originally posted it.

**3.9 Don't air your grievances about the school on social media** – if you are unhappy at any time about any matter related to the school, it is your responsibility to pursue the matter **through the appropriate channels**, which are by personally contacting the respective Head of either the Preparatory School or the Senior School. Having an issue with the school and taking to social media to vent/air your concerns is not acceptable and is in breach of this policy.

**3.10 Failure to mention the name of the school/ person does not remove liability for content that is damaging to the school/ others.** – You do not have to mention a name in order to have identified someone for the purpose of the offence of defamation or *crimen injuria* (infringement of dignity). Similarly, you do not have to mention the name of the school for the content to be defamatory. If it is possible to “guess” who you are referring to, you are as guilty/liable, as if you had mentioned the name.

#### **4. APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

To optimise the responsible use of social media, parents are required to use social media in adherence with the following appropriate and acceptable practices:

**4.1** You must abide by all of the terms and conditions for the social media platforms and facilities that you are using.

**4.2** If you have authority to make claims on behalf of the school, the communication must state and outline the detail of this authority in these communications. **However, simply stating authority does not remove any potential liability for these claims.**

**4.3** If you do not have authority to make claims on behalf of the school, you must clearly state that the content is your own opinion and does not represent the opinions of the school or any other individual at the school. **However, this disclaimer does not remove any potential liability for these claims.**

**4.4** For any school WhatsApp groups, you must adhere to the WhatsApp

guidelines attached to this document as **Annexure A**.

- 4.5** For any emails or email threads relating to school business, you must adhere to the email guidelines attached to this document as **Annexure B**.
- 4.6** You can only use the school logo if you have **written permission** from the Head of School to do so.
- 4.7** You may not create accounts that appear to belong to the school, without written permission from the Head of School and/or Business Manager: Finance to do so.
- 4.8** You must **not** create, post, associate yourself with (i.e. by being in the chain of publication for) or send on any content that includes the following:
  - 4.8.1** Content that may be used for **unlawful purposes**, or that aims to assist with unlawful conduct;
  - 4.8.2** Content that includes any threats of violence or harm of any type;
  - 4.8.3** Content that amounts to hate speech i.e. speech that discriminates on prohibited grounds such as gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation;
  - 4.8.4** Content that is obscene, violent or pornographic;
  - 4.8.5** Content containing communications or images which may be defamatory (i.e. say something bad about someone/an organisation) or violate the rights of another party;
  - 4.8.6** Content containing offensive, abusive, harassing or harmful communications;
  - 4.8.7** Content that is untrue or that is designed to mislead other people;
  - 4.8.8** Content that discloses private information about the school, our pupils or our staff;
  - 4.8.9** Content that is detrimental to the school, or any of its staff, pupils or parents; and
  - 4.8.10** Content that **infringes the intellectual property rights** of another party.
- 4.9** You may only take pictures, video recordings, voice recordings or other

recordings of pupils, other parents or staff, if you have permission to do so. If you have previously taken and/or posted a picture, video recording, voice recording or other recording of another individual and they ask that you delete/remove it, you must do so immediately (unless it contains evidence of wrongdoing).

**4.10** Should you become aware of any incidences of bullying, harassment, sexting or other inappropriate communications concerning or involving any pupil or other individual associated with our school, this needs to be reported to a member of staff immediately.

**4.11** You may not use school social media channels (e.g. school WhatsApp Groups, the school's Facebook page etc) for advertising of any kind. School social media channels are solely for the purpose of facilitating parent/guardian and parent/guardian-teacher relationships, informing parents and guardians about activities at the school and for communicating any last-minute changes in arrangements for school activities.

## **5. POPIACT**

It is worthwhile to read this policy in conjunction with the Protection of Personal Information Act. (PoPI Act – ACT no. 4 of 2013) as legislated by government. In simple terms, the purpose of the PoPI Act is to ensure that all South African institutions and individuals conduct themselves in a responsible manner when collecting, processing, storing and sharing another entity's personal information by holding them accountable should they abuse or compromise your personal information in any way.

**Pease note that children may be disciplined, and even suspended or expelled from the school based solely on the behavioural transgressions of their parents. This is not unique to our school and is a principle that has been enforced in the South African legal system.**

**SIGNED AT \_\_\_\_\_ ON THIS \_\_\_\_\_ DAY**

**OF \_\_\_\_\_ 2018**

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**Parent/Guardian signature**

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**Parent/Guardian full name**

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**Child/Children's names and grade**

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## ANNEXURE “A”

### **Herschel Girls School WhatsApp Guidelines:**

Please adhere to these WhatsApp Guidelines put together to protect both the individual and the school.

#### **1. No “out of hours” use of the groups**

The “hours” of all school WhatsApp Groups are from 6am-8pm. Communications must only be sent between these times. These groups must only be used outside of these hours for emergencies.

#### **2. School business only**

These groups are for school related business only. There must be no unrelated business, current affairs or social issues discussed on these groups. Advertising, political endorsement, memes, jokes etc are prohibited on these groups.

#### **3. Positive content only**

These groups are not places for the discussion of gripes with the school, teachers, parents or students. If there is an issue that is of concern, it must be raised through the appropriate channels not on any form of social media. Always be careful with the tone of your messages and remember that context is often not clear online. Emotions can cause offence/confusion so to use them wisely.

#### **4. Only reply to the message if necessary**

If a message does not require a response, please do not respond. The volume of messages on these groups can become overwhelming. You do not need to acknowledge receipt unless specifically requested to do so e.g. Birthday invites- only reply to the person who invited you, not the whole group.

#### **5. Cultivate responsibility**

Please do not routinely use these groups to find out about your/your child’s homework assignments or tests. We want all students to foster a sense of responsibility for their own learning, and to develop organisational skills. Reliance on these groups, hinders this essential skill development.

#### **6. Our staff**

Please remember that our staff are always available to help but do appreciate a break too. Please do not contact them outside school hours (7am – 4pm) unless it is an emergency.

## **ANNEXURE “B”**

### **Email etiquette at Herschel Girls School**

1. Emails will only be responded to between 7 am and 4 pm. For urgent messages/enquires please use emergency contact details below. All emails will be responded to within 24 hours.
2. Please only use CC/Bcc relevant individuals. The volume of email traffic can be overwhelming.
3. If you have an issue you wish to discuss with the school, please do not copy the email to anyone other than the people directly involved.
4. Avoid sharing any personal information, related to yourself or others associated with the school via email.
5. Please remember that emails can be forwarded and copied, and screenshots can be taken. Be careful what you write/send!
6. Take care when replying/forwarding an email, that any private or inappropriate content from the thread is not being transmitted with it.
7. School related contacts and email lists/groups must not be used for any purposes other than school related business.
8. Email advertising is not permitted when dealing with school related contacts.
9. Please only reply to an email if appropriate i.e. an email addressed specifically to you. Not a bulk email. Acknowledgement of receipt if only required, where explicitly requested.
10. If you have a query regarding an email do not “reply-all”, instead write specifically to the person who sent the email.
11. School based communication must remain fairly formal i.e. it should have a subject line, start with “dear” and end with “kind regards” or similar. It is easy for emails to cause offence as tone and context are not available. Formal language helps avoid confusion.
12. If you have any questions regarding these guidelines, please contact: Deputy Head of Preparatory School or Senior Deputy Head of Senior School.