

Back to School 2023

How to guide: SOCIAL MEDIA



**A step-by-step guide
for schools to get the most
out of social media**

Why use social media?

Most people use social media on a daily basis and users can create, share and engage with content such as photos, videos, posts, news, polls and information in a variety of ways.



For schools, having an active social media presence brings unique opportunities to **connect and interact** with the school community. This includes parents, carers, children and young people, colleagues, other schools, as well as the wider educational sector.

Social media provides a quick, low-cost and low-commitment way to:

- Promote the school,
- Highlight school and pupil achievements,
- Build relationships with the school community.

Selecting your channels

Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform for parents and carers in Northern Ireland.

However, social media accounts can be created on any platform as long as they are properly managed. This includes allocating resource, gathering content, posting and monitoring.



EA encourages schools to consider:

- Which platforms to use
- The intended audience
- The aim(s) of the account
- How social media will be managed

Platforms

Although social media is used to connect and interact with audiences, each platform contain different features and can be utilised in different ways.



Facebook

Best for: connecting with parents and carers



Instagram

Best for: sharing visual content



X (formerly Twitter)

Best for: connecting with the wider educational sector



LinkedIn

Best for: connecting with alumni and recruiting staff

Other popular platforms such as YouTube, Snapchat and Tik Tok are available but may not be the most effective for sharing informative information.

Content ideas

Social media content will be similar to communications already published by the school in newsletters, on C2k, and on the school website. This includes:



- School news and key information
- Pupil achievements (e.g. exam or sporting success)
- Polls and surveys
- Fundraising / charity events
- Staff features and achievements
- School history / anniversaries
- VIP visitors
- Job recruitment
- Sharing educational information

The key to social media is to **create engaging and varied content** that your audience wants to follow. Parents like to see their children involved in a happy, active and inspired school life.

A positive social media approach will also help to build the school reputation and encourage other potential pupils and parents to join and engage with your school community.

Why create a social media plan?

A social media plan can provide your school with an exact set of measurable goals, tactics to meet those goals, and an understanding of the people and resources needed to carry out those tactics.

A social media plan also makes tracking success easier and will give you a point of reference to answer the all-important question: 'Is our social media presence helping the school?'

Actions to consider



Research the sector: Check out what platforms other schools are on and what content they're posting. This will give you an indication of what you should be doing and may even spark some ideas.

Know your value proposition: Think about what makes you different or unique from other schools. This may include, for example, school history, facilities, campus or achievements.

Research the social media industry: Knowing about the latest social media updates and best practices will help to develop your strategy. It is worth noting that the industry and technology are always changing.

Perform a content inventory: Create a bank of photos, videos, blogs, articles, testimonials, etc. that you can use through the year. This content inventory can be used to identify and fill gaps in your Content Calendar.

Two-fold approach

A social media plan should always have two elements: the **actual planned content** (i.e. key messages, dates, campaigns and activities) and the **responsive content** (i.e. things that are unplanned but present the school opportunities or challenges to respond to).



Creating content

The primary forms of social media content are **photos, videos and graphically designed images**. Photos and videos can be taken with a good quality smart phone or digital camera. For graphic design, there are a number of online websites and applications that can be used. These include Canva, Pixlr, and a variety of Adobe software. C2k may also have apps and design resources available.

Once graphic design tools are chosen, we would advise that a 'school style' is developed. This includes brand colours, specific font choices, a photography style, and consideration of how the school logo is used.

Resources

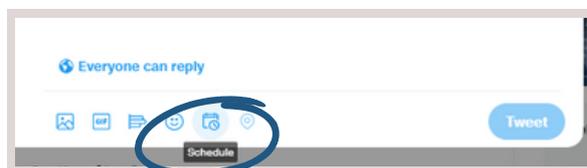
Accompanying this guide is a blank **Content Calendar** for the 2023/24 term. This can be used to create a posting schedule on a daily, weekly and monthly basis; which will help to keep content consistent. Examples on how to use the calendar are shown in the first few days of September.



Managing content

There are resources built-in to social media platforms to assist with managing content. Facebook and Instagram users have access to the Meta Business Suite which offers the facility to schedule content in the 'Planner' and to check performance under 'Insights'. X (Twitter) users can schedule posts on desktop by clicking 'Schedule' when writing a post.

These resources are useful as they mean you do not need to be active online, even if your social media is!



Setting goals

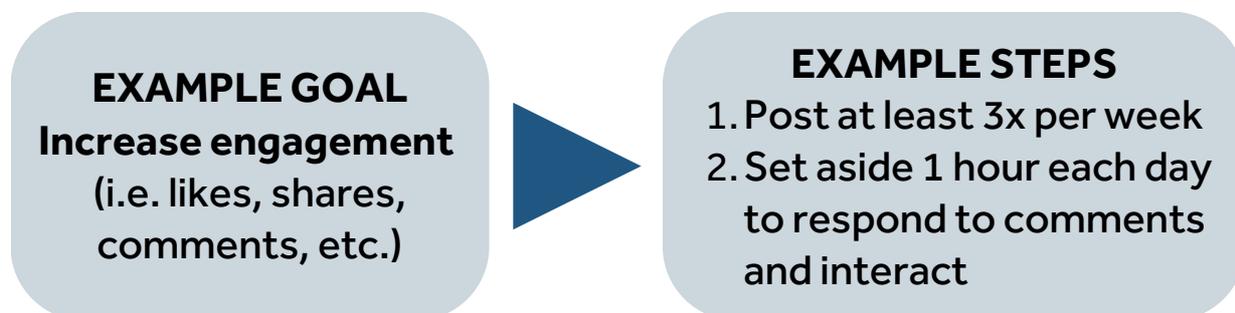
Deciding why you want to use social media, and which channel/s you want to have a presence on, will go some way to determining your end goals as well as leading the direction of your content.

Goals and targets may include:

- **Awareness** - increasing awareness of the school within the community
- **Engagement** - receiving likes, comments, etc. from the online audience
- **Guidance** - providing a channel for parents/carers to contact for advice
- **School reputation** - enhancing the reputation of the school

Steps

Once you've identified your goal, the next task is to create steps to carry it out. Each goal should have its own steps, but there may be some overlap.



Measuring success

There is no standalone number which will indicate the success of your social media post or channel. However, the surest way to understand if your content is performing well or needs improvement is through the '**engagement**' result.

Engagement refers to any action a user took on your post including liking, commenting, sharing and reacting. Without good engagement it is unlikely that your audience will grow or be inclined to follow you.

Making improvements

Weekly and monthly reviews of social media is recommended to assist you in understanding which content works best for your audience. You may find that certain content performs better on some channels than others.

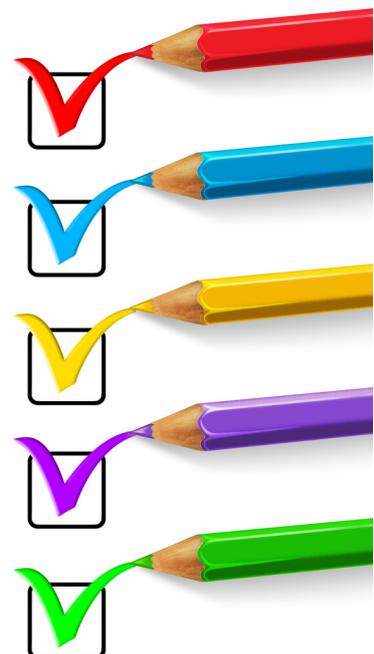
This may mean simple tweaks, or an entirely new approach, such as using video instead of photos, or an infographic instead of text. Please be aware that it will take time, effort and regular monitoring to get social media right.



Best practices

Schools should always have relevant consent when sharing information, photos or videos of pupils. Please also be mindful that information shared online is difficult, if not impossible, to completely erase. Other 'Best Practice' advice is to:

1. Include **links** to the school's social media channels on the school website
2. Maintain an **active profile** by posting at least every other day
3. Consider social media as one of your **main communication channels**
4. Ensure adequate **resource** is allocated to manage channels and content
5. Keep **security information** up-to-date including regular password changes

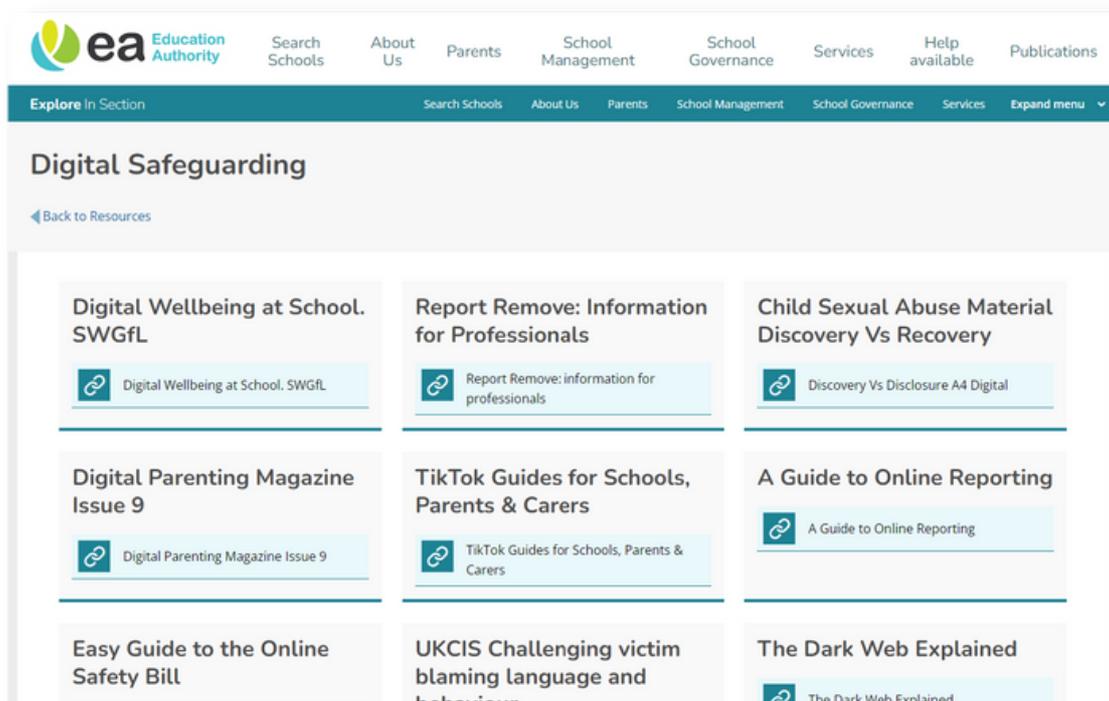


Handling negativity

Each social media platform provides their own instructions and guidance for reporting, blocking and banning users and comments.

The EA takes any online abuse or harassment of schools and staff extremely seriously and will provide advice and support where needed.

For more information visit the Digital Safeguarding resources on our website: <https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/safeguarding-and-child-protection/resources/digital-safeguarding>.



Connect with us

You can find and connect with EA on the following channels:

- Facebook: @educationauthorityni
- X: @Ed_Authority
- Instagram: @educationauthority
- LinkedIn: /education-authority-northern-ireland

