ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

SOCIAL MEDIA PROCEDURE FOR OFFICE BEARERS, STAFF, PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND STUDENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

St Stithians College ("the College") recognises that social media is a very valuable tool for both communication and education. The College would like all students and their parents/guardians to gain every benefit from the opportunities social media offers and undertakes to educate responsible digital citizens. These procedures are to assist the College community in promoting a positive image of the College, to protect what we have and to be protected.

If not used responsibly, social media poses certain risks. The College has a duty to protect itself, and other individuals associated with the College, against these risks. These procedures have thus been created to encourage the use of social media, whilst at the same time reducing the risks to the students, individuals associated with the College and the College's reputation.

The College fosters an open and expressive environment, and respects every individual's right to freedom of speech. However, as an educational institution, the College reminds all office bearers, staff, parents/guardians and students 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 an individual's right to freedom of speech is limited. This is not a limit imposed by the College, but by South Africa's constitution.

These procedures apply to all office bearers, College employees ("staff"), parents/guardians of students and students. The procedures relate to social media used in both a personal capacity as well as that associated with the College.

2. DEFINITIONS

"Social media" = refers to any facility that enables conversations over the internet including blogs, forums, platforms such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Snapchat, X, TikTok, 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 apply to office bearers, staff, students and their parents/guardians when using social media, working in partnership to implement:

3.1 All individuals, whether staff, students or parents can be linked with St Stithians, even if they do not specifically mention the College in social media posts. 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 College, so it is likely that the individual in question attends.

the College) or assumptions that can be made from viewing content regarding the individual on other social media platforms (e.g. being "tagged" in a College photograph by a friend or by the College). This means that these social media procedures and other applicable policies, including the codes of conduct and employment contracts, apply 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (including College holidays). In differing ways, all individuals associated with the College are representative of the St Stithians community.

3.2 "Digital content is potentially 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 can be stolen, images backed up to the Cloud may get hacked, and screenshots can be taken. As a result of this, all digital content is potentially 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 the 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 the individual is as responsible for creating the content, as is the journalist who puts the headline on the front page of the newspaper.

3.4 Digital content creates a permanent record - everything 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 the individual's control.

3.5 Nobody is anonymous online - even if an individual uses social media under a pseudonym, or a spam account it is easy to trace the identity and location of an account holder using an IP address.

3.6 Social media is not "private" and the creators of social media content need to be careful not to post personal information that they would not want the public to see. Particular caution may be needed in relation to sharing information such as full dates of birth and current locations.

3.7 Through using social media, individuals become part of chains of publication. Even if the individual did not create the content, in terms of the law, he/she could be held responsible for any content that is reshared, reposted shared, liked or that he/she is tagged in on social media. Any comments appearing on an individual's posts are also his/her responsibility. If an individual is in a WhatsApp Group, all of the content on that group could be the responsibility of a group member (not just the responsibility of the person who put it there).

3.8 Even if the name of the College, or of a person, is not mentioned in a social media post, this does not remove liability for content that is damaging to the College or individuals. An individual does not have to mention a name in order to have identified someone for the purposes of the offence of defamation or crimen injuria (infringement of dignity). Similarly, an individual does not have to mention the name of the College for the content to be defamatory. If it is possible to "guess" the identity of the individual being referred to, the creator of the social media comment is as guilty or liable as he or she would be if the individual had been named.

4. APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

To optimise the responsible use of social media, the College encourages and expects that its office bearers, staff, parents and students use social media in adherence with the following appropriate and acceptable practices governing such use:

4.1 All persons must abide by the terms and conditions associated with the social media platforms and facilities used.

4.2 If an individual has authority to make claims on behalf of the College, 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 an individual does not have authority to make claims on behalf of the College, he/she must clearly state that the content is his/her own opinion and does not represent the opinions of the College or any other individual at the College. However, this disclaimer does not remove any potential personal liability for these claims.

4.4 For any emails or email threads relating to College business, all persons must adhere to the email procedures, attached as Annexure A.

4.5 For any College WhatsApp groups, all persons must adhere to the WhatsApp procedures, attached as Annexure B.

4.6 An individual or group may only use the College logo, if he/she has written permission from the Advancement Office to do so.

4.7 An individual may not create official College-related social media accounts, without written permission from the Head of School.

4.8 An individual may not create, post, associate himself/herself with (i.e. by being in the chain of publication for) or send-on any content that includes any of 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, in relation to, for example gender, race, culture 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 violates 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 confidential information about the College, the students or the staff;

4.8.9 Content that is detrimental to the College, or any of its office bearers, staff, students or parents; and

4.8.10 Content that infringes the intellectual property rights of another party.

4.9 WhatsApp and other social media groups - any content on a group is just as much the individual's responsibility as the responsibility of the person who created it. In a situation where the content on the group becomes inappropriate in any way and the individual has seen the content, an individual has two options:

4.9.1 The individual can leave the group immediately to leave the chain of publication; or

4.9.2 The individual can document that he/she disapproves of the content (for example, by saying in the group "I do not condone this type of content" or "Remember the Honour Code"), and that he/she wants to remove his/her association with it.

If an individual fails to take either of the options listed above and knows about the content, he/she is choosing to remain in the chain of publication and could be considered as responsible and liable for condoning the content.

4.10 The airing of personal grievances about the College on social media is not appropriate – if an individual is unhappy at any time about any matter related to the College, it is his/her responsibility to pursue the matter through the appropriate channels. Having an issue with the College and taking to social media to vent/air his/her concerns is not acceptable and is in breach of these procedures.

4.11 With the exception of College-organised public events, an individual may only take pictures, video recordings, voice recordings or other recordings of students, other parents or staff and personal property, if he/she has permission to do so. If an individual has previously taken and/or posted a picture, video recording, voice recording or other recording of another individual and is asked to delete/remove it, that individual must do so immediately (unless it contains evidence of wrongdoing that may be relevant to an investigation).

4.12 Should any person become aware of any incidences of bullying, harassment, sexting or other inappropriate communications concerning or involving any student, staff member or other individual associated with the College, this needs to be reported to a senior member of staff immediately.

4.13 Parents who wish to post their children's school activities online should do so with caution as their children's location during the day is identifiable which poses a security risk and if they choose to still post, they should take care not to post other people's children in the photo/video as well.

4.14 Parents, students, staff or office bearers may not use College social media channels (e.g. College WhatsApp Groups, the College's Facebook page etc) for advertising of any kind. College social media channels are solely for the purpose of communicating about College events and activities.

4.15 Hacking, accessing personal information, interference with or wiping of the devices of others (either directly or remotely) are not permitted, without the express written consent of the device owner.

5. PROVISIONS RELATING SPECIFICALLY TO STAFF

5.1 The relationship between staff members and the College is based on trust and confidence, as specified in the employment contracts with the College. All staff members have a legal duty to act in good faith towards the College – this duty extends to not doing anything on social media that may bring the name of the College into disrepute, and requires staff members always to act in the best interests of the College.

5.2 Staff and office bearers should not have one-on-one communication on social media with students where possible. All communication should be in school monitored channels such as Teams.

5.3 Staff should not "friend", follow or be followed by current College students on social media, in order to avoid potential for inappropriate communication between staff members and students. Staff should not engage inappropriately with students on social media. The College prohibits any form of inappropriate verbal, physical or psychological influence or control over its students. Staff shall not initiate or respond to communications with students which, in the context of the teacher-student relationship, are inappropriate in any way. Staff members shall take appropriate steps to warn students who initiate inappropriate communications of any nature (including on social media) that such communication is inappropriate, and will follow appropriate channels in dealing with such communications.

5.4 Staff should not speak officially on the College's behalf. There is a substantial difference between speaking on behalf of the College, and speaking about the College. The Rector is the primary public representative of the College. In certain circumstances, the Rector may delegate this responsibility to specific members of staff. In cases where a staff member encounters a media or social media statement that may require an official response from the College, the staff member is expected to bring this statement to the attention of the Rector's Office and the College's communications staff in the Advancement Office.

5.5 Staff should not share confidential information relating to the College, its students, staff or parents. When posting any communication on social media platforms, staff should take account of the confidentiality obligations contained in their employment contracts with the College. Confidential information relating to students, parents, other staff members as well as internal College processes and developments may not be shared. Subject to the relevant clauses in the College's Terms and Conditions of Enrolment, which address the College's rights to publish personal information relating to the students in specific circumstances, care should be given not to reveal students' personally identifiable information. This includes:

5.5.1 Sharing students' faces or names, unless regulated by the Terms and Conditions of Enrolment;

5.5.2 Making any grades, any assessment, or any part of a student's educational record public; and

5.5.3 Sharing photographs of students' handwriting – this too can be considered personally identifiable information.

If there is any doubt as to what constitutes confidential information, the onus is on that staff member to seek guidance on the matter.

6. ENFORCEMENT OF THIS PROCEDURE

Failure to comply with this Procedure may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the College's codes of conduct applicable to office bearers, staff, students and parents.

These procedures were written in consultation with The Digital Law Company.

Approved by St Stithians College Executive Committee: 12 February 2018

Amended: 24 October 2025

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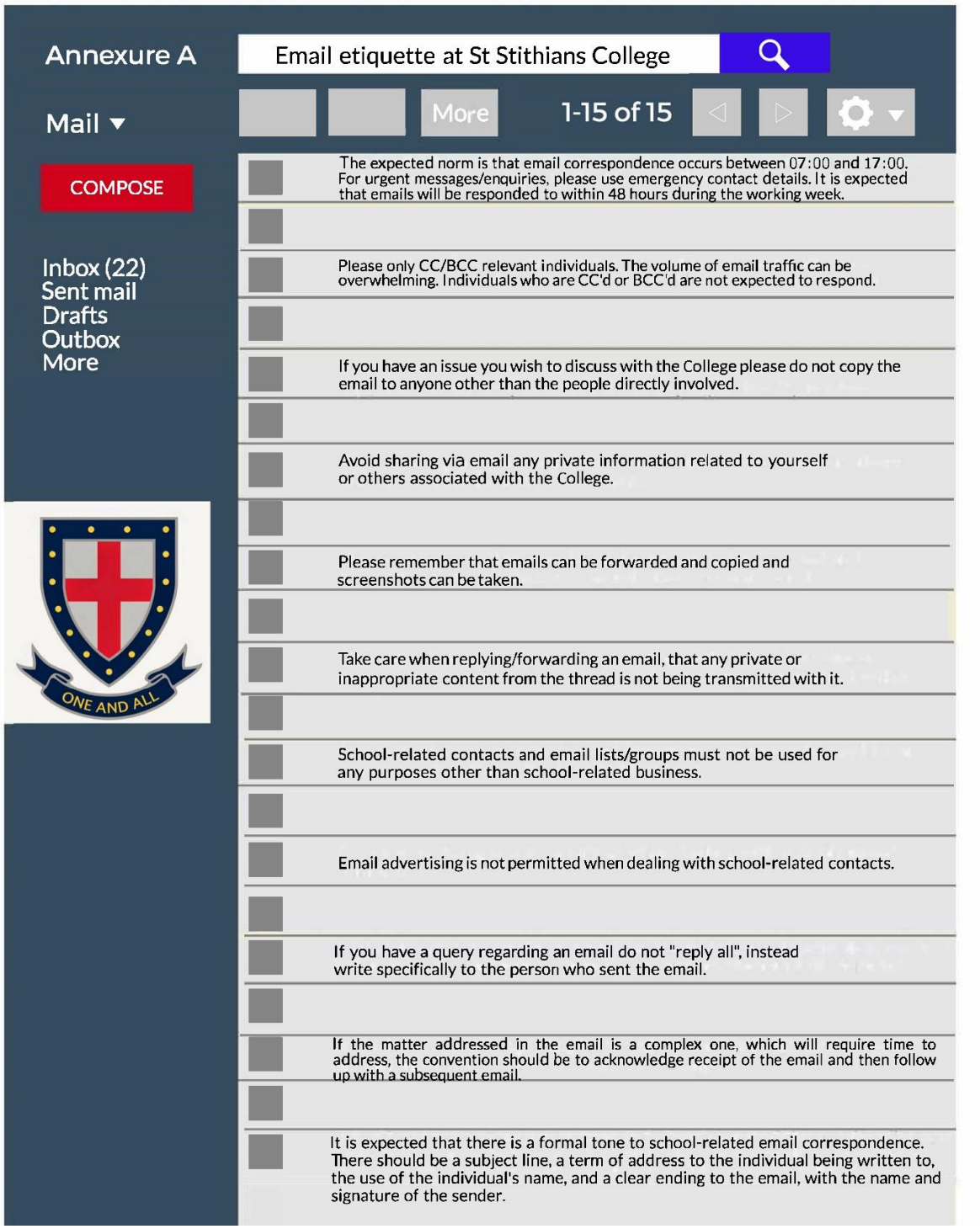
ANNEXURE A: EMAIL ETIQUETTE AT ST STITHIANS COLLEGE



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SOCIAL MEDIA PROCEDURE FOR OFFICE BEARERS, STAFF, PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND STUDENTS
ANNEXURE B: WHATSAPP GUIDELINES

