

# What to Consider when Setting Up an Official Facebook Group

**Please note this guidance is not exhaustive and is intended to support educational settings in making informed decisions.**

Facebook Groups are a restricted area within Facebook that can be shared with selected 'Friends' or members of the community. A 'group' allows full access to the features of Facebook, but can be restricted, so only users who are 'given access' can see all the information.

More information about managing a Facebook Group can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/help/162866443847527/>

## Should we have a Facebook Page, Group or account?

- Pages allow schools and settings to communicate broadly with their communities. Pages should only be created and managed by official representatives. Groups provide a space for people to communicate about shared interests. Groups can be created by anyone. Facebook accounts are for personal use.
  - Be aware that using a Facebook account rather than a group or page to promote a "business" is against Facebook's terms and conditions and schools/settings could risk having accounts closed without notice. Using accounts which "friend" parent or children rather than an official page can also increase the risk of allegations and safeguarding concerns. Therefore the official use of pages and groups is recommended.
- Pages
  - **Privacy:** Page information and posts are public and generally available to everyone on Facebook.
  - **Audience:** Anyone can like a Page to connect with it and get News Feed updates. There is no limit to how many people can like a Page.
  - **Communication:** People who help manage a Page can publish posts as the Page. Page posts can appear in the News Feeds of people who like the Page. Page owners can also create customized apps for their Page and check Page Insights to track the Page's growth and activity.
- Groups
  - **Privacy:** In addition to a public setting, more privacy settings are available for groups. In secret and closed groups, posts are only visible to group members
  - **Audience:** You can adjust group privacy to require members to be approved or added by admins. When a group reaches a certain size, some features are limited. The most useful groups tend to be the ones you create with small groups of people you know.
  - **Communication:** In groups, members receive notifications by default when any member posts in the group. Group members can participate in chats, upload photos to shared albums, collaborate on group docs and invite members who are friends to group events.

## Why would a school/setting want a Facebook Group?

- A Facebook group can be a useful and free way of allowing members of your community to have “private” conversations. This is not something that a Facebook page can offer.
- Facebook groups can be quick and easy to set up and can have significant benefits for learning, communication, engagement and participation.
- Groups enable settings to go where your parents are: many parents rarely check your official website, but may engage with their Facebook account daily – it’s a good way of linking to information you want them to be aware of.
- It is important to note that information on a Facebook group should also be available elsewhere online e.g. school/setting website, Twitter, learning platform, newsletter etc.

## What are some of the risks of having a Facebook Group?

- Facebook groups must be set up by a Facebook user and will be associated with a profile – school/setting staff may use their own personal accounts to manage groups which could blur professional boundaries.
  - If members of staff are identifiable and do not have appropriate privacy settings or appropriate understanding of professional boundaries and behaviour then this could put themselves or others at risk.
- To join the group, users must have a Facebook account – this could exclude some members of the community.
- Users may assume that because the group is ‘private’ that content cannot be shared.
  - All content posted must always be appropriate for a worldwide audience and have appropriate parental consent etc.
- Members of the group could post inappropriate comments or pictures for example spam selling/promoting products or threats to members of the community.
- If the group is open or closed then children, parents or staff could be identified as members of the school/settings which could place them at risk of harm or harassment.
- Underage children (12 or under) or unknown individuals could try and join the group
- The group could be hacked and manipulated.
- Admins could post content which breaches confidentiality or places children or other members of the community at risk.

## Public, Closed or Secret Groups?

When you create a group, you can choose 3 privacy settings: **Public**, **Closed** and **Secret**. The table below shows who can join these groups and what people can see about them.

	Public	Closed	Secret
Who can join?	Anyone can join or be added or invited by a member	Anyone can ask to join or be added or invited by a member	Anyone, but they have to be added or invited by a member
Who can see the group's name?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see who's in the group?	Anyone	Anyone	Only current members
Who can see the group description?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see the group tags?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see what members post in the group?	Anyone	Only current members	Only current members
Who can find the group in search?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see stories about the group on Facebook (ex: News Feed and search)?	Anyone	Only current members	Only current members

- Schools and settings will need to consider which option works best for their needs following a risk assessment.
  - It is recommended that school/settings groups are secret to ensure membership lists are hidden from all but other members.

## What do schools/settings need to consider when setting up a Facebook group?

- **Before setting up:**
  - Be clear about your aims and objectives – know why you want to set up a Facebook group and how it will benefit your school/setting.
    - How will you know if this has been achieved?
    - What will a Facebook group offer instead of a page?
  - Start with consulting with your own community.
    - Consider if there is demand for a Facebook group. For example if parents do not want a Facebook group then there is little point in setting it up!
    - Consider what other options are available and how it can complement existing communication channels.
  - Complete a risk assessment to identify possible hazards and what action can be undertaken to reduce possible concerns. Consider if the school require an open, closed or secret group. This will depend on the ages and objectives and community targeted.
  - Ensure that leaders and managers are engaged with the management of the group and that staff are following appropriate policies e.g. the Acceptable Use, e-Safety and data protection policy

- Consider trialling the group with a group of staff, parents or students or class/year group before whole-school/setting rollout e.g. 'XXXX School Year 6 Parents group or 'History department'. This will help bring out any issues around content, privacy or settings.

## Who should be the Administrators of an official Facebook group?

- It is advisable that the admin is a member of the leadership or management team.
  - It is advisable to have more than one admin, as content should be updated regularly and conversations and content may need to be moderated and sufficient time will need to be allocated to allow this. Schools/settings will need to consider how this can be managed.
- An administrator needs to have a separate **professional Facebook account** (rather than a personal one) and the school/setting page will be set up using this.
  - Check that the other admins have also set up a professional Facebook account to protect against risk and reduce vulnerability for staff.
- The school/setting will need to ensure that all admins have signed an appropriate Acceptable Use Policy and have accessed sufficient training to enable them to manage the page successfully. Admins must be professional at all times and be aware that they are an ambassador for the school/setting.
- Consider how admins will access and manage the group e.g. via a school/setting provided device.
- It won't be appropriate for members of staff to use their personal devices if they are uploading photos of children so they school/setting will need to provide appropriate resources and access.
- Ensure the admins use a strong password which is only available to the admin and the leadership or management team in order to reduce the risk of the site being hacked.
- It is advised that groups are set to 'secret' and users are invited to join via email.

## Who should we allow to post onto the official Facebook group?

- When setting up the group you will have options to set permissions on your page – who can post and who can comment.
  - Schools and Settings might wish to consider removing the option for people to comment or post as this may lead to inappropriate responses. It can also be set so that admins have to approve posts before they can be viewed.
  - It's a good idea to start off by limiting these permissions initially. If a school/setting ultimately decides it would like to expand the permissions it offers its followers, then it's easy to do so. **It's better to become more permissive than more restrictive.**
- Facebook groups can allow members to add others – it is advisable that schools/settings ensure that new members are approved by an admin (and can be verified as a legitimate member of the community) before they can join.

- Although a Group limits who has initial access to content, users should be advised that there is a need to treat anything posted anywhere on the Internet as public. Users should be advised not to post anything that could be in the least bit contentious or breach any existing policies.
- Facebook are known for often changing the way privacy and security settings are displayed or administered.
  - Be prepared to change your settings if Facebook make overall changes – subscribe to the Facebook Safety page to keep updated on any changes.

## Can we involve children aged 12 or under in using an official Facebook group?

- Facebook's age limit is for children aged 13 and over, so it is inappropriate to use an official Facebook group to directly communicate or inform children under 13.
- When engaging with children aged 13+ then schools/settings will need to appropriately assess the decision, considering benefits and risks. Schools/settings will need to demonstrate that all reasonable precautions have been taken to reduce the risks of children being identified.
- Schools/settings will also need to ensure that information can be accessed in other ways e.g. Twitter, school website or learning platform for those not wishing to engage with Facebook.

## Can we share photographs and videos on the official Facebook group?

- Photos of school/setting activity can be a good way of sharing events and information with parents, students and staff.
- Schools/settings should also consider storing the photos in a more secure location e.g. the official website or learning platform, and then linking to them from the Facebook group.
- Admins must ensure that they adhere to the school policy on publishing children's photos e.g. no names of children published and ensure children are appropriately clothed.
- Schools and settings should ensure that image consent forms are up-to-date and cover the use of social media

## What should we avoid posting on an official Facebook group?

- Admins should consider not mentioning specific details when discussing trips and events etc., as there might be child protection issues around revealing where children or staff are going and when.
- Admins must not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of the school/setting unless they are authorised to do so.
- Leaders must ensure there is a clear procedure for admins to follow if there is a concern, for example reporting to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

- Admins should not engage in public debates if opinions or concerns are raised.
- Admins should be cautious when deleting comments, unless they contain credible threats or offensive comments. Opportunities to engage with parents/carers and demonstrate that the school/setting listens to the community might be missed if legitimate comments are removed.
- Admins must not engage with any private messaging with children or parents/carers.

## How do I report a group?

If you are concerned that a group has been set up claiming to represent your school then:

1. Go to the group you want to report
2. Click **...** on the top-right corner
3. Select **Report Group**
4. Choose the option that best describes the issue and follow the on-screen instructions

Facebook will review the group and remove anything that doesn't follow the Facebook Community Standards. Facebook may also warn or disable the person responsible.

## Publishing a Facebook group

- Once you've created your Facebook group, members do not have to be invited until the school/setting is ready.
  - Consult with management, staff and parents before publishing the page to ensure that it's a good reflection of what's happening in your school/setting.

## Evaluating a Facebook group

- Once your Facebook group is live, ensure you set a timeframe in which to evaluate its success and have clear aims and objectives to help you measure this.
  - If a concern occurs, revisit your training and policies and identify any lessons to be learnt.
  - Involve all members of the community in reviewing the success (or not) of the Facebook group – have they had a good or bad experience and do they have any constructive comments or views to help inform you?