Leading Boarding Forward  
BSA Diploma Course

Assignment 3: An Action Research Report

Research Topic: Investigate how Houseparents communicate with the parents and guardians of their boarders using digital and social media as part of an overall review of how staff communicate with parents and guardians.

Proposed Action: Create and implement a Social Media Policy for staff protocol for staff.

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Synopsis
The following document is an Action Research Report which presents my investigation into the most effective way to communicate with parents of boarders in terms of enabling a parent to find or be sent pictures of their child taking part in a school event or activity. ‘The action research approach is used when specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation’, Cohen and Manion (1994: 194) in Bell (2005: 8). The types of communication methods that were investigated were those that used social media tools and platforms as a way to convey information. The data gathered from the research leads to a whole school Digital Communications Protocol¹, which contains ‘recommendations for good practice’ Denscombe (2002:27) in Bell (2005: 8). The conclusions describe the next steps in terms of implementing the protocol, as well as reflections on how I carried out the research.

Introduction and context
The original purpose of the action research report was based on a request from the Headteacher of school; asking whether the school could have a more tailored way of communicating with the parents and guardians² of boarders, for example, enabling a parent to find or be sent pictures of their child taking part in a school event. The assumption made was that with parents being able to view images of their child at various school events that they would feel more connected with their child’s experience at the school. As a serving Houseparent in the school, I have a vested interest in providing a better way of communicating with the parents of the boarders in my boarding house. Also, the school is undertaking an overall review of all of its communication methods, both to external and internal audiences³ i.e. this action research report will form a part of a whole school review⁴ into how we communicate.

In order to gain a full understanding of how the school uses digital communication, I carried out a ‘Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats’ (SWOT) analysis⁵ of the various methods of digital communication used at the School. I concluded that there are a number of ways that we can digitally communicate, using technology, effectively and quickly with parents of boarders and that in some areas of the School, this is already being done.

I also discovered that there were a myriad of methods available and an inconsistency of digital communication across the school. The lack of leadership⁶ and guidance from the school management also leads to the problem of a lack of control of all of the digital communication that is taking place between the school and parents. Through the formation and implementation of a clear, whole school Digital Communications Protocol, we would enable parents to receive much more personalised and consistent communication from the school. The protocol would need to be written in conjunction with any findings of the audit into the whole school communication methods⁷ and would also serve to re-empower the senior managers by re-establishing three ‘power bases’ of ‘expertise, resource control and personal skills’ that Fritchie and Thorne (1998) in Leask et al (1997: 40) suggest exist in organisations.

¹ The document will be called a protocol in the School nomenclature as it is not required directly by ISI
² From hereon in just stated as ‘parents’.
³ External audiences are wider public and alumni and internal audiences are current pupils, parents and staff.
⁴ Led by a senior member of staff, with one of their remits being to review and improve the overall school communication strategy.
⁵ Leading Boarding Forward, BSA Diploma Course. Assignment 1 ‘SWOT analysis of the various methods and channels of digital communication used at the school.’
⁶ Michael Walshe, Growing Talent Ltd, in his ‘Art and Science of Leadership’ describes inconsistency in leadership as a lack of ‘purpose’ that leads to poor ‘performance’.
⁷ Tanya Lee, Deputy Head (Pastoral), The King’s School Canterbury, in her ‘Evaluating Boarding and Raising Standards’ stated need for implementing a plan of auditing that meets the current and future school needs.
The use of social media by independent schools to enhance parent/child experience at boarding school is now commonplace and an integral part of schools’ communication strategies, especially for ongoing marketing of the school in such a competitive environment. For example, positive information can build up a positive reputation to both internal and external audiences of a school in a relatively short space of time. Jamie Barton, describes how ‘social media has been vital in sharing our successes and getting the community on board with Kingsbury for the first time in a long time’ in his blog. He goes on to say that the ‘impact of this ‘good news offensive’’ has increased entrance numbers and inquiries into the school.

**Literature Review**

I carried out a review of the significance of relevant literature and other materials. The review enabled me to understand the action research methodology and choose the most appropriate research methods as action research is not one particular ‘method or technique’ (Bell, 2005: 8). My ‘challenge’ during the actual research phases was to try and separate information that can be ‘universally applied’ and that information that I can apply to ‘suit (my) specific context’, Department of Education (2003: 7). I could dismiss a number of the suggested reading texts, such as texts on topics of Pastoral Care and Behaviour Management, as they did not relate to my chosen topic.

In order to carry a review of the reading list, I checked the suitability of the text by looking at contents the page, synopsis and first few chapters, using on-line book stores’ preview facilities. I found other literature, such as on-line information on the use of social media and also I read Black Box Thinking, Syed (2015). Syed suggests that any errors found in a system or approach to doing something must be identified in order to use them as learning opportunities and, in turn, for the overall system to be improved. This approach is similar with action research in terms of finding out the inefficiencies in the School’s current digital communication methods in order to pursue practical change that will lead to improved communication with parents. Also, the ‘conflict’ of ideas arising from the research can ‘help ensure that different possibilities are properly considered’, Everard et al (2004: 99).

**Planning**

As I had already carried out the SWOT analysis, the main stakeholders were already informed as to ‘why the (ongoing) investigation (was) to take place’ (Bell, 2005: 9), before I began the research. Elliot (1991: 75) suggests that ‘negotiations’ should take place before ‘undertaking the proposed course of action.’ An example of such a negotiation is the more detailed explanation given at one of the weekly Houseparent meetings in Summer term 2016; telling them that the outcome would include an overall social media protocol that would lead to a move towards parity of how the Houseparents communicate.

Bell (2005: 9) also suggests that it needs to be clear who will see the final report and who will have the responsibility for implementing any recommended changes. Although my action research report is part of an overall review of the way the school communicates, the senior managers have agreed that I will take forward and implement any changes identified regarding the school using social media to communicate.

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8 Wendy Griffiths, Head, Tudor Hall School, ‘Meeting the challenges of leading a boarding school’ presentation included data on independent schools market becoming competitive and the need for a range of marketing techniques.


10 [www.future-leaders.org.uk](http://www.future-leaders.org.uk), blog on ‘using social media promote public trust.’

11 On texts under the topics of Research and Management.

The suggested ‘ways forward’ in my SWOT analysis (see figure i below) highlighted a number of areas to research into in order to investigate the solution to the proposed action, with ‘the methods for gathering information depend(ing) on the nature of the information required’, Bell (2004: 8). The research itself would help me to: ‘identify needs and issues, provide evidence for what works and assess progress towards (the Schools’) improvement’, Department of Education (2003: 8-9).

**Figure i): Ways Forward and Obstacles identified from my SWOT analysis:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way Forward</th>
<th>Obstacle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the practical, technical, strategic and budgetary aspects of using intranet/extranet, school website, as well as social media, to digitally communicate to parents.</td>
<td>This process is time consuming and involves numerous discussions with various members of staff as well as the thorough research of the digital communication technology that is available using the resources we have as well as resources we could have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage the parents of boarders in a dialogue regarding digital communication. We will need to find out how and when they currently receive or find information out and what they might want in the future. This will be also combined with showing them what could be made available.</td>
<td>In terms of what is being communicated and when, the feedback from a wide range of parents across the boarding houses this could lead to a vast range of needs identified across all aspects of digital communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research into the practice of digital communication of schools.</td>
<td>Limited amount of information available on other schools’ websites regarding digital communication, such as, the effectiveness of their digital communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a digital communication protocol or policy for the school that defines key elements of digital communication such as, the channel of communication used and the content of the information that is being communicated, for example.</td>
<td>Resistance to change from the ways things are currently done combined with some members of staff lack of confidence in technical their abilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research**

I used a number of research methods to investigate these four areas and validate my theories through practice, Elliot (1991: 69) and have presented some of my key findings in the following section of the report, with the remainder of the information found in appendix i). The headings within the section are:

- **Research Method:** I have stated and justified the reason for using particular types of research:
  - Narrative Inquiry (pupil forum): Using this method, I need to ensure that the ‘information derived could be structured in such a way as to produce valid research findings’, Bell (2005: 21).
  - (informal interviews): This method is useful as it finds out what the situation looks like from others point of view, Elliot (1991: 80).
  - (parent’s forum): A random sample of school parents was used as the whole parent body attending a forum would be impractical and impossible to control.
  - Grounded theory approach (qualitative and quantitative data analysis): The approach to this method is taking ‘grounded’ data and translating into ‘theory’, Bell (2005: 18). There is room for potential error as I will have to draw relationships from the information I find.
  - Case Study: This method does have the disadvantage of being a one off event where it is difficult to cross check the information, Bell (2005: 11).
  - Experimental: Care must be taken with this method as ‘large groups are needed if many variations and ambiguities in human beings are to be controlled’, Bell (2005: 14).
  - Survey (on-line): the same questions were asked of the whole School community, thus forming a ‘census’, Bell (2005: 13-14). Contained within the census were ‘inventory’ Elliot (1991: 82) style questions, listing choices of types of communication to select, for example.
  - Document Review: This is an effective method to gather information quickly but must be checked for bias and factual accuracy.

- **Actions carried out:** I have described what I did to find out the respective information.
- **Brief Description of Findings:** This is part of the ‘reconnaissance’, Elliot (1991: 73) and I have given a summary of the information or data, with more detail given in the respective appendices, where required.
• **The Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol**: I have analysed the data and linked to the outcome of this report, i.e. the Social Media Protocol.

• **Reflections on the research methods**: I have evaluated the actual research method, commenting on error, limitations and suitability of the particular experimental method.

• **Obstacles to the Way Forward**: I have also reflected on the obstacles I listed in my SWOT analysis.

1. Evaluate the practical, technical, strategic and budgetary aspects of using intranet and extranet School website, as well as social media, to digitally communicate to parents.

1 a. **Research Method**: Narrative Inquiry (Informal Interview).

• **Actions carried out**
  Discussion with IT staff regarding possibility of using parent extranet to send images of pupils to specific parents.

• **Brief Description of Findings**
  The method of using the parent extranet as a way of communicating photos for communicating images to parents, was dismissed due to lack of current capability and increased cost implications as our IT staff would have to ask both intranet and extranet to develop the necessary software changes needed.

• **Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol**
  This method had been identified as the potential best method for parents to access images of their son or daughter; with this not being the case, other methods now had to be investigated.

• **Reflections on research methods**
  Although the information given could be seen as technically correct, there is an element of potential bias present as a full investigation of the proposed solution would involve a lot more work for the IT staff member. An advantage of involving key members of the IT staff at this stage of the proposed changes are that they should have a ‘commitment to (the) goals on which (their) sense of achievement depends’, Everard et al (2004: 31).

1 b. **Research Method**: Case Study

• **Actions carried out**
  A number of parents of boarders were sent a link to bespoke photos stored on Google (Drive) Photos\(^{13}\) to share images. Dropbox\(^{14}\) was also trialled using the same approach. Some parents were sent images using an alternative and more secure method to tagging in Facebook, i.e. sending links to the images or photographs via private message if a Facebook follower or via email.

• **Brief Description of Findings**
  Dropbox is quite clunky compared to Google Drive and the images seem better in Google Drive rather than Google Photos and parents found this to be a satisfactory method. Following sending links via Facebook trial, parents and the respective Houseparents were happy with the outcome (both Facebook and non-Facebook users).

• **Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol**
  With both Facebook and Google Photos/Drive trials being successful the protocol will outline these methods so that Houseparents and other staff with access to images of pupils at events and activities can send bespoke images to parents of boarders.

\(^{13}\) Google Drive is a free method of using Google to store and share information via the internet.

\(^{14}\) Dropbox is a free application used to store and share information via the internet.
• **Reflections on research methods**

The outcome of all the practical trials were not expected. With Facebook, it had been assumed that tagging a photo was the only way to send target specific photographs and my early bias towards my proposed parent extranet solution limited my openness towards finding out about other existing methods of sharing photographs.

1 c. **Research Method:** Narrative inquiry (informal interviews).

• **Actions carried out**

I spoke to key stakeholders\(^{15}\) concerned with how the school digitally communicates to its external audience. I also held meetings to gain the experience, knowledge and views of various School staff that are early adopters\(^{16}\) in their use of social media and digital communication as tools to convey news and messages to our external audiences. In order to get the most from the interviews, I tried to suit my ‘management behaviour to both the personalities and the needs of the situation’, Everard et al (2004: 35).

• **Brief Description of Findings**

Two of the Houseparents have a preference for using Facebook to share images and they directly tag\(^ {17}\) photos of pupils. Parents like this approach as they are informed via ‘Facebook notifications’ about the availability of an image of their child. Unfortunately, the images of the named pupils could therefore be more easily seen by an audience external to the school community, causing possible safeguarding risks.

In response to the idea of having parity across the boarding houses in terms of the use of social media being used as a communication tool to convey information to parents of boarders, some Houseparents were happy to carry on and embrace procedural change bought about by a protocol and were also able to help contribute towards it. Some of them expressed their concerns about an increase in work load and they will need to be convinced of the merits by using respective ‘motivators’\(^ {18}\) Everard et al (2004: 34) Other social media users were positive and looked forward to some guidance to help frame what they were doing already in terms of communicating via social media.

• **Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol**

I would be mindful of the work that staff had already started on the use of social media and try to incorporate as much of what they were doing already into the protocol guidelines. In terms of the possible safeguarding risks caused by using Facebook tagging, I fed this information back into my research planning and looked at other and more secure ways to sending images.

• **Reflections on research methods**

The informal interviews are subjective as a way of researching because the staff were spoken to at different times and the questions were not the same. Whilst I would have to filter out bias and agenda from the information given to me from individual staff, the actual process of having the conversation or meeting with the main stakeholders was important in itself as to ensure that staff had a chance to input into any proposed changes.

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\(^ {15}\) Namely, the IT experts at the School and members the school managers, communications officer and the Houseparents.

\(^ {16}\) Early adopters provide a crucial ‘bottom up’ perspective, experience and information, that help us to rapidly learn about inevitable flaws in a proposed idea, Syed (2015: 151)

\(^ {17}\) Tagging is when an image of a person is linked to their account so (depending on setting) others are directed towards that image.

\(^ {18}\) Motivators: people’s need for achievement, recognition, responsibility, job interest, personal growth and advancement potential.
1 d. Research Method: Case study
• Actions carried out
One staff member had the idea of creating an event specific Facebook page for a pupil trip abroad. He invited the specific, respective parents to become ‘friends’ with the page and they were able to see a detailed image library of their child’s experience of the trip.

• Brief Description of Findings
There was a keen interest from the parents in this method of showing images; they commented on feeling more involved in the trip.

• Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol
As part of the protocol, staff have been invited to make new contributions to school social media. Also, this case study exemplifies how the particular message being conveyed should be the starting point in choosing the suitable social media communication method.

• Reflections on research methods
The parents that did take part in the Facebook page were already engaged and interested so their responses could have been biased in a positive way. Not all parents engaged with this idea, so the opinions are not completely represented of all parents. Cognitive dissonance\textsuperscript{19}, Syed (2015), could cause me to ignore the parents who didn’t get involved in the Facebook page in the first place; instead I will ensure that methods of engaging more parents in the use of social media is part of the next steps planning.

Obstacle: All of the investigative methods used above were indeed time consuming. The main support came from those who had ‘time’ to talk to me or who were already involved with social media and were ‘motivated to share learning’, Poet et al (2010) in Department for Education (2003). This report should make any ongoing and future reviews a much easier and quicker process as most of the time spent was trying to find out who to talk to about each specific area and this has now been identified.

2. Engage the parents of boarders in a dialogue regarding digital communication. We will need to find out how and when they currently receive or find information out and what they might want in the future. This will be also combined with showing them what could be made available.

• Actions carried out
The following questions regarding social media were asked at a face-to-face forum for parents:
- How and why do parents use social media, in general?
- Are they aware of the school’s social media presence?
- What constitutes appropriate social media presence for the school (in their view?)
- What would drive them to use our social media?

• Brief Description of Findings
Parents who used social media saw it as a useful tool for immediate news on the schools activities, and as a fun way of feeling included and belonging. They didn’t see social media as a primary tool for critical pieces of information. Again, parents expressed an interest in making social media more easily accessible (e.g. from website front page) and coordinated.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Cognitive dissonance is when we instinctively and sometimes subconsciously block out any apparent errors or mistakes and thus justify carrying on with a system or procedure for example, without looking to see how we can improve and avoid future mistakes or errors.

\textsuperscript{20} At the time of the forum, they were very surprised that we had 14 separate school related Twitter feeds (20 separate feeds as of a later date).
- **Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol**
  Try to encourage more parent involvement and make sure that social media is not the only method used to convey any crucial information.

- **Reflections on research methods**
  There was a mix of what they said they wanted but they agreed on the main themes. As this forum consisted of a random selection of parents, the views given don’t necessarily reflect the views of all of the school parents.

2 b. **Research Method:** Survey (on-line)

- **Actions carried out**
  In addition to the initial research carried out in the SWOT analysis, the parents have been engaged by asking them specific questions (see appendix iii) in a parent forum and by using a survey monkey. The online survey was sent to the entire School community (including previous students), so that everyone connected to the school had the opportunity to participate and comment if they wish. The survey developed on the key messages identified by focus groups and explore suggested changes to current practice.

- **Brief Description of Findings**
  Parents generally felt that the best use of social media was for:
  - Knowing what was happening at the school
  - A feeling of involvement in the event / activity they were following
  - Primarily for fun, not important messages

  Suggestions for improvement of the schools social media elicited 22 individual responses, which fell into three main themes:
  - Give instructions and reminders on how to access school social media
  - Make it more immediately accessible through the main school website
  - Coordinate it

- **Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol**
  The data gathered will be used to shape a school Communications Strategy (see appendix iv), action plan and any new guidelines or policies arising from this work, with the intention of implementing from September 2016.

- **Reflections on research methods**
  The number of those responding, (134 parents), is a good response for a survey monkey and enough to give us a direction in terms of what parents want and is also in line with what was said in the parent forum.

**Obstacle:** There weren’t a vast range of needs identified across all aspects of digital communication as the collective views tallied together; the challenge for future growth is engaging the other parents!
3. Research into the practice of digital communication of schools.

3 a. Research Method: Document Review

- **Actions carried out**
  I requested social media related policies, guidance and protocols from a number of colleagues, including those on the BSA Leading Boarding course. I also researched into the use of social media within the wider educational context and have extensively used the UCISA Social Media Toolkit\(^ {21}\)

- **Brief Description of Findings**
  Although I had a limited response from other schools, some of the responses I did receive were detailed enough to draw upon some social media protocol ideas and themes from such as:
  - An explanation as why to use social media.
  - The need for being a role model when on-line.
  - Links to school policies or protocols that are related to the School use of social media.

  The UCISA document provided an extensive amount of reading and links to literature, as well as useful top tips on writing a social media policy or protocol such as:
  - ‘Fit with mission’ and ‘value driven approach’: how the use of the social media underpins the School values.
  - ‘Benefits realisation’: making the most of the opportunities available through using social media.
  - ‘Compliance’: using a checklist\(^ {22}\) to ensure risks are recognised and managed properly.
  - ‘Identify requirements according to the role’: identifying who is responsible for what when using social media.

- **Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol**
  The direct correlation of the findings and the respective influence on the protocol can be seen in the figure below:

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\(^{21}\) Universities and Schools Information Systems Association: Social Media Toolkit: A practical guide to achieving benefits and managing risks. Section 4. (P20-26)

\(^{22}\) Jisc Social Media for Staff Legal checklist www.jisclegal.ac.uk/Managecontent/ViewDetail/ID/3447/Social-Media-Checklist-10-February-2014.aspx
Reflections on research methods
By engaging with the UCISA research, I have in turn become stimulated and informed in my own research activities, Bell et al (2010), in Department of Education (2003).

Obstacle: I was correct to assume there was a limited amount of information readily available from other schools but the UCISA document did provide an excellent and unforeseen source of information.

4. Create a digital communication protocol or policy for the school that defines key elements of digital communication such as the channel of communication used and the content of the information that is being communicated, for example.


• Actions carried out
My proposed protocol was presented to the school communications officer and others in their department and I explained how main stakeholders have been involved in the ‘fact finding’ as to involve them in the potential changes. I also experimented with using Syed’s (2015) suggested approach by asking the school communications officer to come up with reasons why the implementation might fail.

• Brief Description of Findings
The school communications officer affirmed some of my ideas as well as inputting ideas of their own, such as including firm guidelines as well as ‘top tips’. In reaction to my question about why the protocol would fail, the main reason they gave was that it would fail due to poor management of the change or communication of the change. They said that there was a ‘need to lead people along not impose change’ and that ‘new ways of doing things failed because things were not fully explained or people were not fully involved’.

• Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol
Further to the discussion, the following changes were made:
- Adding twitter know-how from one of the communication team members.
- Aligning my protocol to that of others (see the proposed email protocol in appendix v).

• Reflections on research methods
With insider investigations, difficulties can arise if clearly held views and practices of some participants are challenged. Also, by discussing all of my findings with the person responsible for communication, I could help to triangulate the information, Elliot (1991: 83). My whole approach involved triangulation of the information as I had engaged those involved in social media and compared all of their views and ideas.

The potential issues of poor management of the change can be reverse engineered as to ensure the implementation doesn’t fail. I have already adopted this approach by involving main stakeholders and the school community all have had a chance to ‘participate in the decision taking in which the view of interested parties were sought out before coming to a decision’, Everard et al (2004: 107).
Conclusions
The overall conclusion that I can draw from my research is that I have created a robust social media protocol (see appendix vi) for the school staff to use and that the protocol should help staff to embrace more consistency as well as new modes of digital communications which would enable parents to receive much more personalised and consistent communication from the School.

Within the feedback from parents at the forum and online survey, they requested clear information of where to find the school social media platforms; this has been addressed as part of the proposed action plan (see appendix vii) in terms of reducing the Twitter feeds and in terms of relaunching the school social media platforms in the hardcopy periodical sent out to all of the school community. The action research I have carried out not only defines areas to help measure the effectiveness of the outcome but also, as in the case with the parent feedback, it has already been used to ‘assess the appropriateness from the perception of those on the receiving end’, Department of Education (2003: 9).

Next Steps
The research carried out will be used both in a ‘conceptual’ and an ‘instrumental’ way, Walter et al. (2003), i.e. the research has led to increased levels of understanding as well as changes in practice. I will need to maintain momentum in terms of my findings having an influence on decision making in our School, Collins (2013) in Department for Education (2003), as there are barriers to the evidence being used (I have integrated the checklist for facilitating change into my action plan). My research will continue, reviewing the extensive reading available, such as the University of Illinois, Twitter guide23.

The action plan for the next steps shows various tasks that have and will take place for the change to happen. It also shows each tasks’ respective challenges, for example, those who have started the Twitter feeds that will be consolidated might put up resistance if not given time to understand why the change is happening and thus they will not make full use of my research findings.

The social media protocol will be presented as part of the overall aims of the school communication strategy review to the school managers and key staff before the start of the Michaelmas Term 2016. I will present24 the Social Media aspect to school managers and governors and during the start of the Michaelmas term 2016 to main users of social media. During this phased introduction, we will roll out further trials to test the protocols and ensure confidence and understanding from all involved, especially the Houseparents.

As the Michaelmas term 2016 progresses, the mains users of social media will be required to monitor various statistics to see what the effectiveness of the digital communication methods are. Lomax (2002: 124) (in Bell, (2005: 8)) provides some useful questions for action researchers under various headings, including purpose. I can apply her question of whether ‘I (can) improve my practice so that it is more effective?’ The true effectiveness of the use of the protocol will be monitored over the following terms and beyond, looking at whether we have:

- An increased participation by parents and pupils in our on-line community; measured in the increased number of followers and also, and perhaps more importantly, the increased number of positive contributions and digital interactions that are being made by the School community.

23 http://guides.library.illinois.edu/social-media-best-practices/twitter
24 I will use the presentation skills (Presentation Principles by David Pinnock) from the BSA course, focussing on who I am delivering the message to, for example, the Governors will want to know what is the bottom line and staff will want to know what their responsibilities are.
• Increased hits to our website
• Increased satisfaction and feeling of belonging from the school community, especially overseas parents and the previous pupils.
• Review:
  o Number of parent followers and their participation.
  o Number of hits to the main school website.
  o Parent satisfaction with images of their child that have been sent.

Full launch of the new protocol will then take place at the beginning of the Lent term 2016, following results from the test and trials. In essence, we need to create a responsive feedback loop after the research has been completed in which initial findings generate possibilities for further change and ensure a quicker adoption rate.

Reflections

My own practice will be developed further in a number of ways:

- Directly from using the social media protocol, for example, changing twitter feed name in line with school branding and considering the content of what I tweet and the number of times I tweet per day.
- From looking at the practice of other Houseparents, I will set up my own weekly blog and Facebook page, with a clear idea on how to share images of boarders with their respective parents.
- The detailed research into the use of Twitter has shown me the merits of using the Twitter analysis tools.

I will also approach my next action research project slightly differently by being more aware of my own bias. My original bias in terms of the tools to use were based on early conversations with the IT related staff at the School and I did not want to fully pursue the Facebook route, mainly due to concerns surrounding the risk of images with pupils names on coming into the public domain and causing issues of e-safety related concerns and ramifications. The bias also caused me to have an initial narrow approach, and I was slow to consider the broad range available for the sharing of digital photographs and images. I will use Mezirow’s (1981) in Leask et al (1997: 20) levels of reflectivity, for example, to better my theoretical reflectivity to consider that ‘routine or practice taken for granted may not be the complete answer.’

As the senior houseparent and a member of the team of school managers, I will try to ‘model being an evidence-based practitioner and decision maker’, Department of Education (2003: 29), when implementing new ideas under my remit, such as developing pupil voice or creating new evening and weekend activities for boarders. In my role as a school leader, I will ‘actively set directions, develop people and engage in organisational redesign’, Day et al (2009), in Department of Education (2003), to help create an ‘evidence informed school’, Department of Education (2003).

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25 UCISA Social Media Toolkit states as a good practice tip regarding a social media policy/protocol: Responsiveness - recognise that this is a fast-moving area and ensure that the policy is reviewed regularly.

26 Syed (2015: 60-61) describes adoption rate as the time it takes for mistakes or errors in a system to be recognised and then converted into a learning opportunity that in turn changes and improves the original system or process.
Appendices

Appendix i). Research

Research: I used a number research methods, investigated these four areas and have presented some of my key findings in the research section of the report, with the remainder of the information found below in the following appendix:

1. Evaluate the practical, technical, strategic and budgetary aspects of using intranet and extranet School website, as well as social media, to digitally communicate to parents.

1 e. Research Method: Grounded theory approach (quantitative data analysis)

• Actions carried out
  The number and types of Twitter followers was reviewed by asking Houseparents to count their followers based on certain categories (see appendix ii).

• Brief Description of Findings
  Replies I received from Houseparents indicated that only around ¼ of their followers are actual parents of boarders. Also, there were some inappropriate followers of some school related Twitter feeds.

• Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol
  The protocol will require owners of the Twitter feed need to check each and every new follower for appropriateness and from time to time have a look at who is following them.

• Reflections on research methods
  The small number of actual parents of boarders following the respective Twitter feeds was not expected by any of the staff. This numeric data has provided a positive impetus for staff to encourage more actual parents of boarders to become followers.

1 f. Research Method: Narrative inquiry (pupil forum)

• Actions carried out
  The pupil body was asked a series of questions by their Houseparents, regarding their methods for digital communication using social media, email and the extranet system. Not all pupils were asked in some Houses, just select groups.

• Brief Description of Findings
  The results varied, with older pupils make more use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook with the younger pupils less sophisticated and more instant methods of using social media to communicate, preferring email, WhatsApp\(^{27}\) and Snapchat\(^{28}\). All of the pupils made use of intranet, push notifications when being set prep, they admitted they only used this because they had to!

• Most pupils prefer to get information from teachers via the school intranet.
• About a third say they are happy for email.
• Some have received information via the ‘curriculum subject’ WhatsApp group.
• About 2/3 use the School website
• To communicate with their teachers about 2/3 use email with most having used the intranet to submit work on-line to submit some preps.
• They all felt it was common sense in how they communicated with staff and didn’t think a guide was needed.
• Most didn’t follow Twitter at all as they were not really attracted to using it. There possibly needs to be some form of incentive, perhaps a pupil Tweet of the week competition?

\(^{27}\) WhatsApp is an instant messenger application, usually with multiple people following

\(^{28}\) Snapchat is an instant messenger application which shows a message for up to 10 seconds.
• Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol
Although some pupils engaged in the School use of social media, there was room for improvement; perhaps as part of developing the School Social Media protocol, more pupil participation is actively encouraged, with Tweet of the week competitions or the use of surveys or best photograph etc.

• Reflections on research methods
All of the pupils were asked the same questions (sent by the communications officer to the Houseparents); this would hopefully lead to a more consistent approach and a truer representation of what the pupils thought without external bias. The findings were as expected and despite there being a select group and the findings are in line with previous discussions regarding pupil’s use of digital communication.

1 g. Research Method: Grounded theory approach (qualitative data analysis)

• Actions carried out
The type of Tweets that School staff posted were reviewed.

• Brief Description of Findings
It was found that some staff are using very local jargon that will not be understood by a wider audience.

• Influence and significance of findings on social media protocol
This sort of jargon would be better for more closed groups, such as those parent on Facebook. As part of the implementation of the protocol, the content of the social media will have to be regularly monitored; this will be mentioned in the protocol itself.

• Reflections on research methods
The review itself didn’t need to be extensive as evidence of the jargon was found quite quickly. It was quite surprising that some staff had not considered/remembered that their posts were being read by a much wider audience than their colloquial language allowed access for.
Appendix ii). Twitter followers statistics
The number and types of Twitter followers was reviewed by asking Houseparents to count their followers based on certain categories:

Email sent to Houseparents:

Twitter feed stats
Good afternoon all,

As part of the whole school review of communication and in particular how we use social media to communicate, I am looking at who actually follows each house Twitter feed and who you follow and would like your help by you looking at your followers and who you follow in more detail.

Perhaps one of your pupils can add up the following number of followers/who you follow for each of the categories below? Just click on your follower’s total number and a full list will appear, same for who you follow. Please feel free to add another category if need be. An interesting exercise as it shows you who is actually following you; I found one random follower (who I have now blocked and reported) that had some inappropriate posts! Please could you get this to me by half term?

The categories for your follower/who you are following stats are (I have added followers of my house just for your info):

Total House followers =x
Parent of pupil in house=x
Parent of other school pupil=x
etc

From other Houses:
Various data
Appendix iii): Questions for on-line survey

General Information

1. What year is your child (children) in? Please tick * all that apply.
   • Form 1 / Year 7
   • Form 2 / Year 8
   • Form 3 / Year 9
   • 4th Form / Year 10
   • 5th Form / Year 11
   • Lower Sixth / Year 12
   • Upper Sixth / Year 13

* 2. And which house(s)? Please tick all that apply.
   • List of names of houses

Social Media

3. In your personal / professional life, which social media channels do you use? Please tick * all that apply.
   • Facebook
   • LinkedIn
   • Twitter
   • Instagram
   • WhatsApp
   • Snapchat
   • I don’t use social media.
   • Other (please specify)

4. Are you aware of the schools social media channels?
   • No - I don’t use social media.
   • No - I didn’t know the school had any.
   • Vaguely - but I do not follow any channels.
   • Yes - I do follow at least one of the schools social media account.
   • Other (please specify)

Social Media (continued)

5. Which school social media channels do you follow? Please tick * all that apply.
   • our main School Twitter feed
   • House Twitter feed
   • Sport or departmental Twitter feed
   • Head teachers Twitter feed
   • House Facebook page
   • House blog
   • Other (please specify)

Social Media (continued)

6. Do you find the school’s social media * easy to access?
   • Yes
   • No
7. If no, how could we improve access to our school social media?

8. In your opinion, what is the best purpose / use for the school’s social media? Please tick all that apply.
   * 
   - It is primarily for fun, not for important messages.
   - It makes me feel like I am involved in the event or activity.
   - I like knowing what is going on at my child’s school.
   - It’s really for marketing / promotional purposes.
   - It should have important messages / information.
   - Other (please specify)

9. Do you have any other comments on the school’s social media?

Emails
10. In terms of quantity, how do you feel about the number of emails you receive * from the school?
   * 
   - Far too many emails.
   - Too many, but manageable.
   - About right.
   - Not enough.
   - Far too few to know what is going on.
   - Other (please specify)

11. In terms of content / quality, are you happy with the emails you receive from the school?
    - Yes, they are generally well-written and clear.
    - Most of the time.
    - Sometimes.
    - No, emails are poorly written and confusing.
    - Other (please specify)

Emails (continued)
12. How can we improve the quality and content of emails we send to parents?
Emails (continued)

13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about emails you receive from the school?
   - Website, Calendar and Publications
   - Annual Yearbook
   - School Magazine (2-3 issues per year)
   - Half termly Email
   - House Newsletters
   - School Website
   - Termly Calendar
   - Any comments?

14. Please rank the quality of the following publications and communications. If you do not use one, please tick ‘N/A’.
   - Website, Calendar and Publications
   - Annual Yearbook
   - School Magazine (2-3 issues per year)
   - Half termly Email
   - House Newsletters
   - School Website
   - Termly Calendar
   - Any comments?

15. Please rank the usefulness and importance of the following publications to you. If you do not use one, please tick ‘N/A’.
   - A School app
   - Text message alerts for fixture changes, travel delays, and other important messages
   - A weekly email news round-up for all nonessential school information
   - Online-only reports (e.g. no reports posted out)
   - Are there any other initiatives you would value?

16. We are considering a few initiatives to improve communications with parents, including a school app, text message alerts for important information (e.g. fixture changes), and a weekly email round-up for non-essential information. Please give your thoughts on how highly you would value each service.

17. Do you have any suggestions or comments on how we can improve our School communications?
Appendix iv). Communication strategy based on the survey results.

Research

Parent Survey: Social Media
134 school parents responded to a 17-question online survey covering use of social media, email and School publications. Parents represented all houses and all year groups:

School parents use a variety of social media, most notably Facebook (88, or 66% of respondents) and WhatsApp (61, or 45% of respondents). They also use LinkedIn (55 / 41%) and Twitter (47 / 35%), with very small numbers using Instagram, Snapchat, Google Hangouts, or messenger services. A small number (15 / 11.5%) reported that they do not use social media at all.

Parents find the school social media accessible, with 82% reporting some knowledge of it. Nearly 70% report it is easy to access. These answers could be a product of those who were interested enough to respond in the first place (e.g. this is not a random sample of school parents).

The most popular social media channels followed are:
- House Facebook pages (40 responses)
- School corporate Twitter feed (33 responses)
- House Twitter feed (29 responses)
- Sport / Departmental Twitter feeds (25 responses)
- Headteachers Twitter feed (22 responses)
- House blogs (16 responses)

Parents generally felt that the best use of social media was for:
- Knowing what was happening at the school (75 responses)
- A feeling of involvement in the event / activity they were following (42 responses)
- Primarily for fun, not important messages (41 responses)

Suggestions for improvement of the school’s social media elicited 22 individual responses, which fell into 3 main themes:
- Give instructions and reminders on how to access the schools social media
- Make it more immediately accessible through the main school website
- Coordinate it
Parent Survey: Emails
In terms of emails, the best news was that parents, as a whole, feel that the quantity of email communication they get from the school is ‘About Right’ (78%). The remainder feel that they get too much or too little in relatively even numbers. In terms of the quality, 87% of parents felt that emails were mostly or always well-written and clear. A few complaints concerned either the timing (e.g. sent out too late or too close to the date of the event) or lack of proofing (e.g. wrong dates or details).

There were 34 suggestions as to how email communication could be improved. These fell into 4 categories:
- Coordinate emails into a daily/weekly bundle before sending.
- Do not presume prior knowledge on the part of the parent.
- Proofread carefully before sending.
- Make sure it is obvious emails are from the school.

Parent Survey: Publications
Parents generally ranked the school publications as being of a high quality. Yearbook, magazine, school newsletter and House newsletters all averaged 4 (out of a possible 5), whilst the School website averaged 3.5 and published Calendar 3.75.

Of the publications listed above, parents rank House newsletters and the published (hard-copy) calendar as being the two most important and useful publications. The website ranked lower as a ‘useful’ publication, but it also received the most complaints about its content, appearance, ease of finding information and regular updating. The findings suggest more parents would like to use the website as a ‘go-to- source of information, but they are not yet confident that it is updated regularly enough.
Appendix v). Email Code of Conduct

Details removed
Appendix vi): School: Social Media Protocol

Consistency of message

The use of social media to communicate to our school community provides a valuable, regular and time efficient method of providing news, data and information and thus updating those who are associated with or interested in the School, and hopefully engaging them in a greater collaboration within the School digital community and beyond.

With this in mind, any message or news item, information or data posted via any social media platform or tool should underpin the School ethos and values. As per the Boarding Principles and Practice section of the Boarding Policy, when referring directly to School pupils, we should aim to show them as:

- Extract from the boarding policy here

We should also aim to promote what we provide at the School, for example:

- A community where children find care, guidance and security
- A values orientated approach, using the school values: school values listed here.
- A family atmosphere where every individual is expected to show consideration, thoughtfulness and concern of others.
- Students are encouraged to take full advantage of the wealth of opportunities (made possible by the boarding ethos).

Crucial information should be communicated via email and social media can be used as an additional method, in conjunction with the email.

Role models

As well as communicating to our school community, the nature of digital community implies that our communication can be seen by the wider public. Please bare this in mind when posting your message; we serve as online ambassadors and positive role models for our pupils and parents to follow. In order to ensure the high quality of our communication, the content of the social media will be regularly monitored.

Please read this social media guide in conjunction with other School documents pertaining to digital communication methods, tools and hardware (Child Protection and Safeguarding Data Protection Policy, Boarding Policy, Internet Acceptable use for all Staff and Network User Agreement for all staff, for example).

If you would like to discuss training for use of social media platforms, please do speak the communication officer in the first instance.

Current platforms used

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Blog
Future methods being trialled:

- Google Photos/Google Drive for sending images of pupils.
- DropBox
- ClickView (for live streaming of events)
- Flickr

Social Media protocols

If you would like to contribute to or setup a school affiliated social media site/page, please contact the communications officer in the first instance.

We would like to encourage more participation by parents and pupils in the School Digital Community; as well as details of events and pupil participation, please post information that can be responded to, such as surveys, questions or competitions.

Twitter

Owners of the Twitter feed need to check each and every new follower (you will receive an email from Twitter) for appropriateness and from time to time have a look at who is following them in terms of staying in touch with their audience.

- Max Tweet length: 140 characters
- Current Twitter convention is to add web links at end of posts
- A web link – long or short, doesn’t matter (it used to, until recently) – eats up 23 characters of space
- Tweets posted with a picture enjoy 150% more engagement than Tweets without
- Add up to 4 images per Tweet. The first image you add will show biggest in size. For example:
  - Adding an image eats up 24 characters of space. Adding a 2nd, 3rd or 4th image does not eat further into your 116 remaining characters
- Twitter likes jpegs. It does not let you illustrate posts with, say, a PDF
- (@handles and #hashtags)
  - Use people’s / organisation’s correct Twitter @handles to guarantee they notice you
  - Follow them first to – for convenience - get predictive text when you next use their @handle
  - @Using a handle at the start of your Tweet means only they will see it
  - Click on your account’s Notifications to see who’s talking about you, who Likes your posts and who’s Retweeting you
  - You can privately Message people on Twitter (like Facebook Messenger) but you must follow each other first
  - A #hashtag is you trying to tap into a wider conversation / community – ie. #StrictlyComeDancing
    - But... Tweets including more than two #hashtags lose 17% of engagement on average
- Tweet 1-4 times a day for engagement sweet spot. More than that and Followers are quickly bored / irritated
- Less is more: Tweets under 110 characters create 17% more engagement
- People use Twitter in the day. Tweet from 8am-7pm and enjoy 30% more engagement
- Post a poll and invite people to vote on something. Up to 4 choices. Max poll length: 7 days
When posting on Twitter, please use the following protocols:

**Profile Photo:** specific to the area of the School the twitter feed has been set up for. Please ensure that the photographs/images used are up-to-date. (see appendix for a work example)

**Header Photo:** to include the School brand water mark. (see appendix for a work example)

Whoever’s email is inputted must regularly check those who follow and block/report any inappropriate followers.

Using @ or the # symbols: if you use @ then your feed will also display on the twitter feed you apply. For example, the following tweet would also go directly onto the main School Twitter feed: *a house tweet @schooltwitter more of the tweet*

Although newsworthy for the followers of @House twitter followers, perhaps the following would be better, so that the School can trend: *a house tweet #schooltwitter more of the tweet*

All School Twitter feeds will be followed by the main School feed and they will retweet/like your tweet as appropriate.

Do communicate with the communication team on news or events before, during and after each event – there could be relative material to be disseminated and fed from the main School twitter account.

**Facebook**

When using Facebook, please ensure that your security settings are up to date and appropriate – see ‘General Account Settings’ and Facebook Help Centre for more details. If you are sharing or tagging photographs or images, especially of pupils, please ensure that you have read in detail and understood the principle of Photo Privacy, tagging and Audience Selection.

To share photographs without tagging, please use the following:

**Sharing images**

You can share a photo/s or an album of photos directly via email, by sending a link to the photo.

- For an individual photo, select the photo, then ‘Options’ and then from the drop down menu select ‘get link’
- For an album, select the album, then the gearwheel (top right) and select ‘get link’ from the drop down menu.

Share the link with directly with Facebook users via a private message or copy and paste the link into an email, even if they don’t have a Facebook account.

Note: You can only share a link to photos you’ve created. You’re unable to share links to albums that are automatically created (ex: Profile Pictures, Mobile Uploads).
Pupil photos and images used

Please do post photographs of events, which include pupils. Please note the pupils that cannot have their image posted.

Also, please be mindful of posting images of other people, such as colleagues and parents, seeking their permission first.

The social media use guide is written as to from a guide for digital medial use with some firm protocols as well as suggestions and web links to more general guidance. Guidance for the use of photographs of pupils (devices used to take the photographs and the storage of pupil photographs) has been raised over the past few terms and the attached document should be read in conjunction with all previous advice given.

Useful Links:
Bitly provides a shorter URL if you want to embed a link. This can be particularly helpful if you are tweeting as it saves characters. https://bitly.com/

Appendix

Image showing how a twitter front page should be branded.
Notes

As part of the ongoing ‘refining’ of the way the School communicates, the methods, platforms and tools that staff are already using to provide a digital presence has been reviewed.

The review has taken the form of:

- Taking stock of the way we use digital communication at present.
- Asking the School community about their use of digital communication.
- Looking at other independent schools and their approach

The review has produced the following outcomes:

- A social media protocol.
- A consolidation of the number of twitter feeds that the School uses (at a date= x20 individual Twitter feeds).

The consolidation of the number of Twitter feeds is in no way to discourage the use of Twitter and other social media; hopefully staff will see this development as a way to fully support the work they have already started in giving the school a presence in the digital community. By taking stock of where we are now, we can continue to grow our digital presence and encourage the increased participation of our school community; ensuring that what we post on-line is on brand, provides a true representation of the broad activities and events that the School provides, informs the school community and the wider community in a timely fashion of school news and that all postings are congruent to the ethos of the school.

The true effectiveness of the use of the protocol will be monitored over the following terms and beyond, looking at whether we have:

- An increased participation by parents and pupils in our on-line community; measured in the increased number of followers and also, and perhaps more importantly, the increased number of positive contributions and digital interactions that are being made by the school community.
- Increased hits to our website
- Increased satisfaction and feeling of belonging from the School community, especially overseas parents and the previous students.
Consolidation of Twitter
There will be the unfortunate but necessary need to transfer of followers from the current feeds to the consolidated ones. This does provide an opportunity to refine some of the followers. Hopefully the all parent/previous pupils/pupil communication informing them of the new feeds to serve to re-acquire the existing followers and generate some new followers in the process.

Due to the number of followers already build up, the following Twitter feeds will remain in their current form:

*List of various school twitter feeds.*

Please find below the new Twitter feeds, with current feeds included to show where they will now contribute from.

*List of various school twitter feeds.*

When posting about a specific activity or Department, the tweet should use a #, for example, #Geography or #Music.

**Merge into main @school feed:** @ *List of various school twitter feeds.*

**Facebook**

We have the following School affiliated Facebook pages

*List of various school Facebook pages.*

**Blog**

*List of various school blog pages.*
Appendix vii). Action Plan
I have also integrated the checklist for facilitating change, Collins (2013), in Department for Education (2003):

**Access**: The way the research is communicated.
**Relevance**: focused on what they are doing already.
**Credibility**: show the range of evidence drawn from.
**Engagement**: actively involve staff in protocol.
**Usability**: translating my research findings into useable practices.
**Time, skills and confidence**: allow users time to build up confidence using the new skills.

**Organisational support**: support the changes from the management team down.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Potential Conflict</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree on way of sending/’tagging’ pupil images. <strong>(Engagement)</strong></td>
<td>Houseparents would not want to move away from using Facebook but current method has potential safeguarding issues. <strong>(Relevance)</strong></td>
<td>Trial use of sending links/using Google photos or Google Drive. Also, using Twitter private message. <strong>(Credibility)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out who is in control of each School associated Twitter feed</td>
<td>Some of the staff who are in control of a respective feed are leaving the School.</td>
<td>Email the staff and get in touch before they leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve School Twitter users about consolidation— gain agreement on main title and who fits where; bring all Twitter feeds in line. <strong>(Engagement)</strong></td>
<td>Some staff will not want to give up what they have started and merge with other Twitter feeds.</td>
<td>#subject to promote new or continued involvement in the Twitter feed. <strong>(Usability)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out who is in control of each Facebook pages</td>
<td>There wasn’t any conflict and this has been completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree number and style/content of Facebook pages so don’t have same situation that Twitter feeds got to</td>
<td>Staff will have their own views on what their Twitter feed and Facebook pages will look like.</td>
<td>Start with the school branding and explain to staff why we want to have some consistency in appearance of Twitter and Facebook pages. <strong>(Credibility)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce staff protocol. <strong>(Usability)</strong></td>
<td>Staff will not make use of or they might not understand or agree with the new protocol.</td>
<td>Show staff the detail of the protocol using INSET sessions; showing worked examples and explain reasons for each part of the protocol. <strong>(Access), (Usability)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce grid for who is responsible for what in terms of School associated Social media i.e who contributes to Twitter feeds. <strong>(Organisational support)</strong></td>
<td>Some staff will want a role before they are trained to use social media/follow the protocol.</td>
<td>Show staff the detail of the protocol using INSET sessions; showing worked examples and explain reasons for each part of the protocol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could have parent portal and developed use of Facebook to replace Google photo.</td>
<td>Cost of using intranet software development.</td>
<td>Revisit this approach at a later date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wait to relaunch of Social media via school magazine in January 2017 and engage more parents in the use of social media. <strong>(Time, skills and confidence)</strong>.</td>
<td>Some parents might not understand what is being done.</td>
<td>Houseparents to use social media directly as to make parents aware of new approach/s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


http://www.future-leaders.org.uk/insights-blog/using-social-media-promote-public-trust/?gclid=CjwKEAjw5cG8BRDQji_CNh9nwxTUSJAAHdX3fo2BSXAZuBJf3g8qA9YG0Pviqs0HOewC8yliNJgFBoCa7Tw_wcB

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