# Operational Policy: Communication and Social Media (NAG 5)

## Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ

## Statement of Intent:

The Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) recognises that social media provides opportunities to collaborate and communicate with communities of interest. It also enhances learning opportunities for ākonga.

BLENNZ uses social media to share information about its services and activities, and to enable conversations and feedback.

The guidelines within this policy are provided to ensure staff and ākonga can access social media sites relating to BLENNZ and its community in a safe, open, trusting and collaborative manner. The best interests and safety of both ākonga and staff is paramount. To this end staff should be mindful that they do not become over-familiar with ākonga and whānau through failing to maintain a professional relationship. This includes the use of cell phone and email messaging and social networking sites. This does not preclude staff continuing to maintain social media connections with parents and ākonga prior to employment with BLENNZ, however to maintain transparency staff are encouraged to disclose these to their line manager. Nor does this policy preclude staff, in their teaching role, supporting ākonga to learn to access social media on ākonga devices, but this will not involve “friending” them.

Staff will be made aware that in the course of its business BLENNZ may observe content and information made available by staff through social media platforms. BLENNZ employees are not allowed to make any comments that could bring BLENNZ into disrepute. If staff do publish comment on their personal sites in relation to BLENNZ, a disclaimer must be used such as “the postings on this site are my own and may not represent the positions, strategies or options of BLENNZ”.

## Definitions:

Communication and Social Media: a platform or application that enables users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Examples are (but not limited to): Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Linkedln, TikTok, BeReal, Snapchat, Instagram, Flickr, Wikis, blogs, Messenger, Email, special interest forums and user communities. Content shared may include (but is not limited to) personal information, opinions, research, commentary, video, pictures or BLENNZ information. If you come across anything about BLENNZ on social media where the poster is requesting information or support, please direct them to BLENNZ website or the [info@blennz.school.nz](mailto:info@blennz.school.nz) email address.

## Policy Guidelines:

1. As employees, staff are role models for ākonga and the BLENNZ community. Care must be taken to ensure when using social media that the values and norms of BLENNZ are not misrepresented.

2. Facebook must not be used as a communication platform as part of a staff member’s role within BLENNZ. This includes the use of Messenger and relates to communication with ākonga, families and staff.

3. Principles of ethical behaviour must be followed at all times. Examples can be found in:

[Aotearoa Education Council - Teachers' Code of Professional Responsibility](https://educationcouncil.org.nz/sites/default/files/Code%20Guidance%20FINAL.pdf)

[Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand](http://www.arataiohi.org.nz/code)

BLENNZ Code of Conduct

[Code of Ethics - OMA Australasia](https://www.omaaustralasia.com/about-us/membership/omaa-code-of-ethics/)

4. Appropriate professional language must be used in all BLENNZ communications.

5. The tone and content of posts relating to BLENNZ must be considered.

6. Private and professional use of social media must be kept separate at all times.

7. Ākonga and whānau must not be invited to any staff personal social network sites.

8. Invitations from current ākonga and whānau to friend, like or join their personal social networking sites must be declined.

9. Do not respond to personal requests for help or advice from current ākonga and whānau through social media. This is not the appropriate forum through which to provide support. Such support can be provided through email, over the phone or in person.

10. All BLENNZ online spaces set up for social media purposes must be approved by the Principal or a member of the Senior Management Team. This is to avoid legal and/or ethical issues and to monitor content. Once approval is received the online spaces must be set up in consultation with the Co-ordinator Digital Access & E-Learning (DAE). The Co-ordinator DAE will be the administrator of all BLENNZ groups.

11. Staff are encouraged to use privacy settings to ensure their personal information is kept private and not accessed by other groups. Remember that “friends” can tag and share your information, providing a wider audience that may have been originally intended.

12. In accordance with the NZ Privacy Act 1993 (and any amendments), images of ākonga and whānau must never be posted on a social media site without written approval from parents. Ākonga 18 years of age and over who have the understanding to make an informed decision, can give permission without parental contact.

13. Staff must never name BLENNZ ākonga or whānau on any personal social media accounts.

14. Appropriate permissions must also be sought prior to the posting of any personal or professional images taken on any BLENNZ site, of current or former staff members or others associated with BLENNZ.

15. BLENNZ will not permit the inappropriate use of social media by staff including:

* Breach of copyright when using or repurposing material i.e. whilst it is acceptable for people to share what has already been posted on the BLENNZ website or Facebook page, staff must not take and use any of the photos from the website or Facebook page for other forms of communication without acknowledging the source
* The publishing, posting or releasing of any information that is considered confidential or not public
* Inappropriate use of language or images that portray BLENNZ in a poor light
* Actions that bring the reputation of BLENNZ into disrepute
* Making promises or statements regarding BLENNZ which are misleading, fraudulent or false
* Use of social media to defame, bully or discredit another staff member, group or anyone else
* Use of discriminatory, defamatory, abusive or otherwise objectionable language in content
* Accessing, downloading or transmitting any kind of sexually explicit material and violent images
* Accessing, downloading or transmitting any material deemed to be illegal under NZ law
* Compromising the privacy of any person
* Making a statement that might bring BLENNZ into disrepute
* Committing BLENNZ to an action or initiative without appropriate authority
* Not complying with laws covering libel, defamation, privacy and the protection of intellectual property
* Statements that might be interpreted as being in contravention of the values of BLENNZ.

16. Approved use of social media for BLENNZ purposes is allowed, however personal use of social media networks or personal blogging of online content during work time is discouraged.

17. If contracted BLENNZ staff wish to publish material relating to BLENNZ on social media sites, this must be approved by the Principal.

18. Subject to applicable law, after-hours online activity that violates this or any other BLENNZ policy, may result in disciplinary action.

## Supporting Documents:

[Ministry of Education website: Social Media Terms of Use](https://education.govt.nz/footer/social-media-terms-of-use/)

[PPTA - Safe Interaction with Students](https://www.ppta.org.nz/dmsdocument/136)

[Netsafe NZ - Educational Advice](https://www.netsafe.org.nz/advice/education/)

[Privacy Act 1993](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1993/0028/232.0/DLM296639.html)

BLENNZ Cybersafety and Digital Citizenship Policy

BLENNZ Code of Conduct

[Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0063/latest/whole.html)

[Aotearoa Education Council - Code of Professional Responsibility](https://educationcouncil.org.nz/sites/default/files/Code%20Guidance%20FINAL.pdf)

[Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand](http://www.arataiohi.org.nz/code)

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Approved: 

Date: 9 February 2023

Next Review: 2026

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(Signed to confirm policy has been read and understood)

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(Signed to confirm dislosures (if any) have been discussed with line manager)

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