# Tribunal ruling highlights risks of mixing professional and private chats at work



A recent tribunal ruling has highlighted the complexities and risks associated with the blending of professional and private communications among colleagues through WhatsApp group chats. The case, centred on a children's nursery in St John's Wood, north London, underscored how such digital interactions can blur boundaries, potentially leading to significant workplace conflicts.

The dispute involved deputy manager Laura Pagnello and Barrow Hill Pre-School. The tribunal revealed that Ms Pagnello, who is related by marriage to the nursery’s owner, Mandy Rogan, was referred to in the group chat as "witcheypoo," an incident that prompted her to take action against the nursery. Despite her case being dismissed, the judgement brought attention to the nursery’s conduct and the broader issues resulting from mixing work-related messages with casual, and sometimes inappropriate, conversations.

Judge Garry Smart, presiding over the case in central London, described the matter as a "simple issue" that had unexpectedly escalated into a series of complications. The triggering incident occurred in June 2023, when Mrs Rogan left work due to a medical emergency. This absence left the nursery temporarily understaffed, leading to Ms Pagnello raising concerns to the nursery's trustees, and parents, that the staff-to-child ratio was "in breach of the law."

The small team, which included childcare practitioners Kelly Shailer and Karen McKenna along with Ms Pagnello and Mrs Rogan, were members of a WhatsApp group named the "A-Team." The tribunal noted that these group chats often combined professional discussions with social interactions, such as jokes and casual chatter, which, in this instance, contributed to the breakdown of relationships within the staff.

Following the staffing issue, the relationship between Ms Pagnello and her colleagues worsened. On the last day of the term in July, Ms McKenna and Mrs Rogan were reported to have gone for an extended "bottomless prosecco" lunch, while Ms Shailer left directly for holiday, further straining workplace dynamics.

Judge Smart expressed disappointment at how the issue expanded into a "family feud," including calls to the police, a "dubious" referral to the local authority, immature comments via WhatsApp, and the eventual resignation of every trustee from the nursery’s board. The tribunal’s observations serve as a cautionary example of the challenges faced by organisations in managing professional relationships when private communication platforms are involved.

This case illustrates the evolving nature of workplace interactions in the digital age, particularly concerning the use of social media and messaging apps, where the line between professional and personal life can become indistinct. The judgement points to the importance of clear policies and communication strategies to avoid similar conflicts in other workplaces. The Daily Mail is reporting.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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