# Schools seek legal guidance on parent WhatsApp groups amid employment rights concerns



In a significant shift within the educational sector, schools across the United Kingdom are increasingly turning to legal experts to establish codes of conduct for parent WhatsApp groups. This trend is emerging in light of the ongoing discussions surrounding the Employment Rights Bill, which, if passed, could hold employers accountable for failing to protect staff from harassment, including abuse disseminated through communication platforms like WhatsApp.

Many headteachers are expressing concern over potential liability, fearing that they could be taken to court if defamatory or abusive comments are made about staff members in these parent-led groups. It is reported that educators are often not even part of these WhatsApp threads, which are typically formed by parents of children sharing classes. The gravity of this situation has prompted schools to seek legal advice urgently, particularly from leading law firms such as Mischon de Reya, on how best to regulate behaviour in these digital forums.

In a statement to The Times, the head of the education group at Mischon de Reya remarked, "Schools are very concerned about the impact on staff and being held liable for what's been said in class WhatsApp groups and are implementing codes of conduct for parents." This evolving legal landscape implies that schools may be expected to take action should a WhatsApp group foster "an intimidating or hostile environment" for teachers, including the sharing of offensive or abusive remarks.

The concerns go beyond verbal abuse, with an emphasis on the potential spread of false information that can exacerbate tensions between parents and school staff. Alistair Wood, the chief executive of Edapt—a support service for teachers—shared insights into this issue, stating, "We frequently support staff where issues have escalated after misinformation or misunderstanding shared online. These situations can quickly erode trust and take significant time for school leaders to resolve, drawing them away from their core role of running the school."

These concerns come against a backdrop of a recent incident involving Times Radio producer Maxie Allen and his partner, Rosalind Levine, who were arrested on suspicion of harassment and malicious communications following complaints made on WhatsApp regarding the teacher recruitment process at their daughter’s primary school in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire. Allen labelled the police response as "dystopian" and accused Cowley Hill Primary School of attempting to "silence awkward parents". After a five-week investigation, Hertfordshire Constabulary determined that there was no case to answer for the allegations concerned.

As schools grapple with the implications of the proposed Employment Rights Bill, the role of parent WhatsApp groups continues to be a contentious issue, with potential legal ramifications prompting educational institutions to take proactive steps to safeguard their staff and maintain a professional environment.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://oatlands.ie/code-of-conduct-for-school-whatsapp-groups/> - This URL provides a detailed code of conduct for school WhatsApp groups, highlighting the importance of respectful communication and the prohibition of inappropriate posts or grievances about staff, which supports the trend of schools establishing codes of conduct for such groups.
2. <https://brunswickparkprimary.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Policy-and-Code-of-Conduct-for-Acceptable-Use-of-Class-and-Year-WhatsApp-Groups.pdf> - This document outlines guidelines for using WhatsApp groups in schools, emphasizing respect and appropriate behavior, which aligns with schools' efforts to regulate these groups and avoid legal issues.
3. <https://www.eleanorpalmer.camden.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Whatsapp.pdf> - Eleanor Palmer Primary School's guidance on WhatsApp groups underscores the importance of maintaining a respectful environment, which reflects the broader concern of schools to ensure positive communication in parent-led groups.
4. <https://www.times.co.uk> - As a leading news source, articles in The Times often cover educational issues and legal developments such as the Employment Rights Bill, which could affect schools' liability regarding staff harassment over platforms like WhatsApp.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news> - BBC News frequently reports on significant incidents involving legal issues related to social media and schools, such as harassment allegations and the response of educational institutions.
6. <https://www.mishcon.com> - Mishcon de Reya's website might provide information on their role in advising schools on legal matters, including the establishment of codes of conduct for parent WhatsApp groups.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14604609/schools-ask-lawyers-draw-codes-conduct-parent-WhatsApp.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data