

Background

Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service that allows you to send out short messages called tweets. Tweets are limited to 140 characters but can also contain media like photos or videos. When you set up a Twitter account the default is for it to be public, so anyone can 'follow you' and your tweets are visible to any Twitter user. (However, you can decide to restrict your Twitter account.) When someone 'follows you' they see your tweets in their timeline. The purpose of Twitter is to "create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers".

A number of schools are using class or school Twitter accounts to share information with parents and communicate with chosen public figures. This document is designed to share safe ways to tweet, and points to consider.

Note: Twitter is not designed to be a tool for children under 13 so it isn't appropriate for young learners to be using it directly with a personal account. The Twitter's privacy policy states that:

"Our Services are not directed to persons under 13. If you become aware that your child has provided us with personal information without your consent, please contact us at privacy@twitter.com. We do not knowingly collect personal information from children under 13. If we become aware that a child under 13 has provided us with personal information, we take steps to remove such information and terminate the child's account. You can find additional resources for parents and teens [here](#)."

A school could potentially use Twitter for class accounts and under 13s could be supervised to contribute to these.

Why do you want to use Twitter?

Firstly, consider your options for communicating with parents as alternatives may be more private and secure. Many schools have a parental messaging system and this can be used for more than 'late' or 'school closure' alerts, for example to send SMS messages about events and links to newsletters. Some parental messaging systems also enable use of multiple languages when phone messages are left. A school's (private) on-line portal, such as a Learning Platform, can provide access to classroom information and links to useful home learning sites or activities. There are Early Year formative assessment tools that enable parents to receive e-mailed photos and comments on 'what was achieved today'.

Find out the percentage of parents that have a Twitter account. If it's high then Twitter may be a route to communicate more effectively with parents.

Having decided that Twitter is for you, start out by having a clear purpose for using. For example it may be to 'tell parents what we were doing in class today'. Be clear and communicate this with parents from the outset. You may wish to use Twitter with parents to:

- Engage because parents rarely check the school website or online portal
- Promote school activities and useful information
- 'Market' the school and promote a positive picture of the learning that is taking place
- Communicate with other schools and public figures and take learning beyond the four walls of the classroom.

Before setting up:

1. Do a risk assessment: i.e. consider reputational damage risks of any inappropriate posts or comments; data security risks such as ensuring not exposing private information on staff or pupils; e-Safety such as the risk of unblocking Twitter in school and ensuring that there is appropriate password control on the account; operational risks such as time commitment to keep it going after initial 'flush' and that there are understood protocols for use, etc.
2. Ensure that senior management are engaged with the project and that all staff are following the school e-safety and data protection policy. If you haven't already, include a statement on use of social media in your e-safety policy.
3. Plan to start small: start with one class and one teacher, for a pilot project.

What do you need to consider?

Select your Twitter ID for your school.

1. Choose your school's Twitter ID carefully because you can't change the name once you've selected it. Your school's Twitter ID will be limited to 15 characters.
2. As you select a name think of your branding and how you want your school to be known. If your formal school name is longer than 15 characters is there a shorter name or nickname your school is known by. Your school name may have already been used by another school, so you may have to compromise.
3. It's recommend that you don't use any special characters or spaces but this may be necessary if another account has already been created with the name you desire.

Personalise Your Twitter Profile.

1. Upload a profile picture. Probably best to use your school logo, school seal, or even a well-known image of the school.
2. Enter the school name, location, and school's website.
3. Complete the bio section with a general description of your school. Have a look at some others e.g. *X Primary School - Community school in the heart of London's Notting Hill. Loving Learning. Making a Difference. Tweets by staff*
4. Navigate to the Design section and select a solid background colour that is one of your school's colours. Consider if you want a banner graphic and prepare it.

Set-up and administration:

Public or private?: Twitter accounts have the option of public or private (protected) settings – if you protect your account, your tweets cannot be copied (retweeted) by others and will only be seen by people you approve as your followers. If you think of your Twitter account as an extension to your school's public website, unless you intend to tweet confidential or sensitive information, or photos of students that parents have not given permission to be online, a public Twitter will probably suit you. [Just for clarity: By default, if the parents who follow the school reply to any tweets, just the school will see them. However, if the parents start to follow each other, they see replies sent to the school from other parents.] If the school ultimately decides it would like to make the account public then it's easy to do so. You may decide it's better to become more permissive than more restrictive.

Owners and account names:

1. Each Twitter account has to be linked to a unique e-mail. You could link to an individual class teacher's StaffMail account. However, it's probably better to have a Shared Mail Box set-up in Staffmail – so that more than one teacher can access, e.g. there may be two Year 1 teachers and the Head Teacher who want to control the tweets about Year 1 class. These users will be the account's administrator(s) and owners of the password. With staff turn-over, it's probably important that more than one person knows the password and can re-set it if someone leaves or there is a security breach on the account.
2. Consider the class names for your accounts. Teachers leave, classes move up at the end of the year. So, it's probably sensible to choose something generic.
3. Make a password that is not easy to crack.

Operational matters

1. Decide how teachers will tweet – they should be using school devices rather than their own mobile phone, in order to protect themselves from risk. Agree an approach on the content that will be tweeted and tweet from school where possible, not home.
2. Be careful IF running apps that allow posting to accounts, such as tweetdeck because you could accidentally post a personal tweet to a school account, particularly if using a personal device (see point 1 above).
3. Ensure staff who tweet, know they must Log Out when finished writing a tweet. If you do not log out, anyone with physical access to the machine will be able to use the account as you. This also means they could change the password and take over control of the account.
4. Share your Twitter account with parents by sharing the name of the class account with them so they can follow you. If you are using Protected Accounts, it means the school must also 'approve' the followers. [You would send parents the specific link and the account owner would approve them.]
5. Photos of school activity can be a good way of sharing events with parents. Ensure that you adhere to your school policy on publishing pupil photos. So, remember that IF you post pupils photos you need to have signed permission to use those students (and staffs) photos online.
6. Ensure safety issues always considered when sending out tweets, for example do not mention specifics when discussing trips etc., as there might be child protection issues around revealing where pupils are going and when, if the account is public.
7. Have a school 'champion' who can help new and less confident teachers. This helps maintain a momentum for using Twitter, and supports professional development.
8. Remember as a tweet can only have 140 characters, including spaces, if you wish to give a link, you will probably need to use a link shortening tool such as <https://bitly.com/>
9. Ensure operational staff know the basic tools of Twitter and how to block a user – should you have need: <https://support.twitter.com/groups/52-notifications/topics/213-following/articles/117063-blocking-users-on-twitter> and how to delete a tweet – although once posted, it will have been cached or possibly re-tweeted, so maybe re-found. <https://support.twitter.com/articles/18906-deleting-a-tweet>
<https://support.twitter.com/articles/31796-my-account-has-been-compromised>