



SOCIAL MEDIA & DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP POLICY (2026)

1. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Policy Owner	SMT and Board of Governors
Drafted By	SMT
Date of Approval	01 March 2026
Review Date	January 2027
Related Policies	Data Management & POPIA Compliance Policy (2026); Anti-Bullying & Harassment Policy (2026); Parent Partnership & Grievance Policy (2026); Learner Code of Conduct & Handbook (2026); Staff Code of Conduct & Disciplinary Policy (2026).

2. PREAMBLE & ETHOS ALIGNMENT

Technology is a gift, but it requires character to use well. At Loreto Convent School, we practise **Digital Citizenship** grounded in our values.

Guided by the charism of **Mary Ward**, this policy is anchored in:

- a) **Sincerity:** We do not present a false image of ourselves or the school online. We are authentic.
- b) **Justice:** We do not use digital platforms to mob, bully, or defame others.
- c) **Joy:** We use technology to build community, not to tear it down with gossip.
- d) **Truth:** We do not spread misinformation, unverified content, or deliberately misleading material online. We hold ourselves to the same standard of honesty in digital spaces that we do in person.
- e) **Freedom:** We use our digital freedom responsibly. We recognise that genuine freedom requires formation — the well-formed person chooses to build up, not tear down.
- f) **Excellence:** We hold ourselves to the same standard of excellence online that we aspire to in all areas of school life. Our digital presence reflects who we are.

3. LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

This policy is drafted in compliance with:

- a) *Children’s Act 38 of 2005* — governing the protection of children in digital and physical spaces.
- b) *The Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020* (regarding harmful data messages).
- c) *The Films and Publications Amendment Act* (regarding “revenge porn” and child safety).
- d) *POPIA* (regarding the posting of photos/names).

- e) *SACE Code of Professional Ethics* (regarding staff conduct).
- f) *South African Schools Act (SASA 84 of 1996), Section 8* — governing the school's Code of Conduct and jurisdiction over learner conduct.

4. FOR LEARNERS: THE “DIGITAL UNIFORM” RULE

4.1. The “In Uniform” Rule

- a) When a learner is in the Loreto Convent School uniform (or wearing school sports kit), they represent the school.
- b) **Prohibited:** Learners may not post content in uniform that depicts:
 - Smoking, vaping, or drinking alcohol.
 - Sexualised dancing or behaviour (e.g., certain TikTok trends).
 - Disrespect towards staff or school property.
- c) **Consequence:** Bringing the school into disrepute via social media is a **Level 3 Disciplinary Offence** (Suspension/Expulsion).

4.2. Cyberbullying & Malicious Content

- a) **Zero Tolerance:** Creating or sharing memes, stickers, or videos that mock, humiliate, or threaten a teacher or fellow learner is forbidden.
- b) **The “Like/Share” Rule:** If you “like,” “share,” or are a silent member of a group spreading hate speech or bullying material, you are considered **complicit** in the chain of publication.
- c) **Deepfakes:** Creating AI-generated images of staff or learners (e.g., “nudifying” apps) is a criminal offence under the Cybercrimes Act and will be reported to SAPS.
- d) **Restorative Process:** Alongside any disciplinary consequence, the School Counsellor will be involved in all learner social media offences. The goal is formation — helping the learner understand the harm caused and develop better digital judgement. This is not a substitute for consequence; it accompanies it.

4.3. Unofficial Digital Spaces

- a) The school acknowledges that it has no authority to moderate, monitor, or control unofficial digital spaces — including learner-created or parent-created WhatsApp groups, group chats, or other private online forums that are not administered by the school.
- b) However, the school's jurisdiction over learner conduct is not limited to its physical premises or its official platforms. In accordance with the school's Code of Conduct and Section 8 of the South African Schools Act (SASA, 84 of 1996), a learner may be subject to disciplinary action for conduct occurring in unofficial digital spaces when that conduct:
 - a) targets, harasses, bullies, defames, or threatens a fellow learner, member of staff, or other member of the school community;
 - b) violates the school's ethos, values, or Code of Conduct in a manner that materially affects the school community; or
 - c) constitutes a criminal offence under the Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020 or any other applicable legislation.
- c) **For clarity:** the school is not asserting the right to police private conversations. It is asserting that membership of this school community carries ethical responsibilities that do not disappear when

a learner moves from a school platform to a private one. A learner who would not bully, defame, or harass a classmate in the classroom is held to the same standard in a private chat group.

- d) Any disciplinary action arising from conduct in unofficial digital spaces will follow the school's standard disciplinary procedure, including the right to written reasons and the right of appeal as set out in the Learner Code of Conduct & Handbook (2026).
- e) **Evidence:** Where conduct in an unofficial digital space is reported to the school, the school will only act on reliable evidence (e.g., screenshots provided by an affected party). The school does not conduct covert monitoring of private communications.

4.4. How to Report

- a) A learner who experiences cyberbullying, inappropriate digital contact, or any online safety concern may report to the School Counsellor, a trusted teacher, or the Deputy Principal. Reports are treated with confidentiality. Learners will not be penalised for reporting in good faith.
- b) Anonymous reports may also be submitted via the Ethics Box in the Library.

4.5. Vulnerable Learners

- a) The SBST is responsible for identifying learners who may be at heightened risk in online spaces — including those with a history of bullying, social anxiety, or learning barriers. The School Counsellor provides additional pastoral support for these learners proactively, not only in response to incidents.

5. FOR STAFF: PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

5.1. The “Friend” Boundary

- a) **Current Learners:** Staff may **not** “friend,” “follow,” or communicate privately with current learners on personal social media accounts (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.).
- b) **Exception:** Official school accounts (e.g., “Loreto Netball”) managed by staff for professional purposes are permitted. A platform such as Class Dojo, which is used by staff to communicate effectively with parents, is also permitted.
- c) **Alumni:** Staff may connect with learners only after they have matriculated and left the school.

5.2. Reputational Management

- a) Staff are advised not to post content on their personal profiles that undermines their professional standing (e.g., excessive alcohol consumption, disparaging remarks about the Catholic Church or the school).
- b) **“Venting”:** Staff may not discuss internal school grievances, colleagues, or parents on social media. Staff with workplace concerns must use the Staff Grievance Procedure (2026) — not social media.

6. FOR PARENTS: WHATSAPP & COMMUNICATION

6.1. Official vs. Unofficial Channels

- a) **Official Channels:** The D6 Communicator and school email are the only official sources of school news.
- b) **Unofficial Channels:** Parent-created WhatsApp groups (e.g., “Grade 8 Parents”) are private spaces. The school **does not** moderate them and accepts no liability for content shared there.

6.2. Conduct in Groups

- a) Parents are expected to adhere to the Parent Partnership & Grievance Policy (2026) in all online conduct, including unofficial groups.
- b) **Prohibited:** Using a class WhatsApp group to mobilise against a teacher, share unverified rumours, or identify/shame another parent’s child.
- c) **Grievance Procedure:** Complaints must be directed to the school via email, not vented in a WhatsApp group. The Principal reserves the right to issue a legal “Cease and Desist” for defamation occurring in parent groups.

6.3. “Sharenting” (Privacy)

- a) Parents may not post photos or videos of other people’s children (e.g., from a swimming gala or class play) on social media without the express permission of those children’s parents. This is a requirement under the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA, Act 4 of 2013). See also the school’s Data Management & POPIA Compliance Policy (2026).

7. CRISIS PROTOCOL

In the event of a viral negative incident (e.g., a fight video trending, a scandal):

- 7.1 **Do Not Engage:** Staff and parents are asked *not* to comment on or “defend” the school in the comments section. This fuels the algorithm.
- 7.2 **Report:** Send screenshots immediately to the **Designated Media Officer** (Principal/Marketing).
- 7.3 **Official Response:** Only the Principal or Board Chair is authorised to issue statements to the media or online.

8. DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The school integrates digital citizenship education into the Life Orientation programme and/or relevant co-curricular structures. Learners are actively equipped to navigate online spaces responsibly — not only disciplined when they fail to do so. An annual digital citizenship awareness session is held for all learners and is made available to parents.

The school's official social media accounts are managed in accordance with the values of this policy — authenticity, dignity, community-building, and child protection. The school does not use its platforms to project a curated image that misrepresents the real community it serves.

9. APPROVAL

Signed on behalf of the Board of Governors:



Date: 01 March 2026

Fatima Rawjee
Chairperson: Board of Governors

Signed by the Executive Principal:



Date: 01 March 2026

Suzette Truter
Executive Principal