

The Daily Telegraph



Teachers warned about befriending students on social websites

- By **Miawling Lam**
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- **22 comments**

TEACHERS could be sacked or have their pay docked for befriending students on Facebook, Twitter and other networking sites in a move aimed at preventing inappropriate relationships.

Under a revised code of conduct effective from this year, public-school teachers have been told not to get personal in email, blogs and wikis.

"You must not invite students into your personal social networking site if it contains personal information or inappropriate comments or images," the policy states.

"Your professional relationship may be compromised if you invite students to join your personal electronic social networking site or accept students' invitations to join theirs."

Teacher groups say they understand the need to exercise caution on the internet, but argue the policy is yet another attempt to undermine those in the profession.

NSW Teachers Federation senior vice-president Joan Lemaire said the document was an invasion of teachers' personal space.

She said it went too far in its attempts to mandate compliance and created a fine line between a teacher's personal and professional life.

A teacher will be in breach if they identify themselves as a teacher and criticise the NSW Government or the Education Department.

"It concerns us that the code of conduct seems to be aimed at preventing teachers from speaking out on certain issues," Ms Lemaire said. "This document seems to be more aimed at seeking compliance and not actually recognising the need for teachers to be respected in their professional judgment."

The code of conduct is a list of rules that govern the day-to-day behaviour of all public-school teachers and TAFE instructors.

Those who contravene the code will be counselled, have their pay docked, be demoted or sacked.

Ms Lemaire said that unlike other professions, whose codes of conduct were compiled by members, teachers were made to follow specific orders from the Education Department.

"The federation believes a code should be developed by teachers, for teachers and should acknowledge their professional conduct," she said.

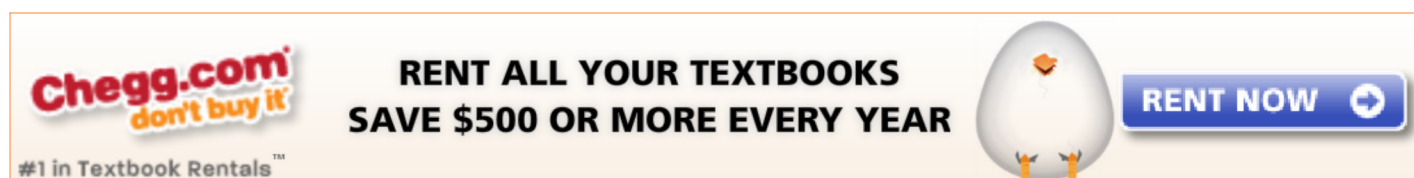
The removal of a clause explicitly stating that staff had the same rights as other citizens was a serious flaw of the new code, Ms Lemaire said.

Phrases such as "you must follow reasonable instructions" and "comply with a lawful direction" suggested teachers were no longer afforded civil liberties, she said.

The changes come in the wake of a cyber-bullying incident involving a female Year 7 student from Rose Bay Secondary College.

It is understood the student created an offensive Facebook page about a male science teacher late last year and invited friends to join the page.

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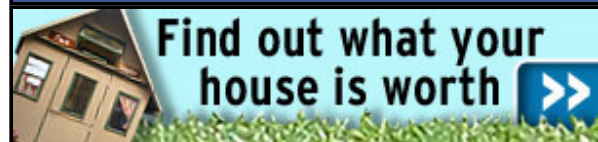
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