



The British International School of Sulaymaniyah

(IQ010)

Anti-Gossiping Policy

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1. Overview

Gossiping, often understood as casual or idle talk about others, has been a part of human societies for as long as language has existed. Historically, gossip has been used as a means of social bonding, creating a sense of shared understanding among groups¹. Early human forager groups have used it to manage social dynamics, mitigate the risk of free riders, and maintain the group's egalitarianism². In today's day and age and especially in a professional setting, however, such forms of social monitoring are largely outdated, as more sophisticated and technologically advanced methods have replaced them. Furthermore, gossiping can now have detrimental effects on individuals and communities, particularly in professional environments. In our school, gossiping can lead to misunderstandings, create divisions, damage reputations, and encourage a toxic work environment, which is counterproductive to our ethos of respect, professionalism, and inclusivity. This policy outlines the school's stance on gossiping and provides guidelines for maintaining a positive and respectful work environment.

The scope of this policy covers all members of staff at the British International School of Sulaimaniyah, including teaching staff, administrative staff, support staff, and management.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- a. Foster a professional and respectful work environment free from gossip and its harmful effects.
- b. Protect the dignity and reputation of all staff members, with a particular emphasis on preventing gossip that can be particularly damaging to female staff in the context of a Middle Eastern society.
- c. Establish clear guidelines and consequences regarding gossiping about superiors and colleagues.

2. Definition of Gossip

Gossip is defined as the sharing of personal or sensitive information about another individual without their consent. This includes but is not limited to discussions about a person's personal life, professional performance, or any other information that is not publicly disclosed. Gossip can occur in person, through electronic communication, or any other form of communication.

¹ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Harvill Secker, 2014), 147.

² Christopher Boehm, *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* (Basic Books, 2012), 60.

3. Scenarios and Adverse Effects

The following are examples of gossip and their potential negative impacts:

- a.** A group of teachers is overheard discussing the recent divorce of a colleague during a break. They speculate about the reasons behind the divorce and make assumptions about the colleague's character based on rumours. This type of gossip can invade the privacy of the colleague, leading to embarrassment and emotional distress. It can damage the colleague's reputation within the school community and create a toxic atmosphere, eroding trust and respect among staff.
- b.** During a CPD, some teachers whisper about a new teacher's classroom management skills, suggesting that they are not competent enough for the job. This rumour quickly spreads to other staff members. Such gossip undermines the new teacher's confidence and may impact their ability to perform effectively. It creates an environment of distrust, where staff are hesitant to collaborate or support each other, and damages the professional reputation of the new teacher before they have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their abilities.
- c.** Some staff members begin to speculate and spread rumours about the motivations behind a recent decision made by the school's management, suggesting favouritism or unfair treatment without any evidence. This type of gossip undermines the authority and credibility of the school's leadership, creates division and mistrust between staff and management, potentially leading to a breakdown in communication, and encourages a culture of negativity and suspicion, which can detract from a positive and collaborative school environment.
- d.** A group of male staff members is overheard making comments about a female colleague's appearance and personal relationships. They imply that her promotions are due to her looks rather than her capabilities. Such gossip perpetuates gender discrimination and can contribute to a hostile work environment, especially in a Middle Eastern cultural context where such remarks can have severe social repercussions. It undermines the professional achievements of the female colleague, affects her morale and productivity, and can lead to a lack of respect for female staff, affecting overall gender equality in the workplace.
- e.** Staff members notice two colleagues frequently having lunch together and begin to gossip about a potential romantic relationship between them. These rumours quickly spread throughout the school. This type of gossip can damage the reputations of the individuals involved, lead to unnecessary speculation about their personal lives, and create an uncomfortable working environment. It can also affect professional relationships and collaboration, as the colleagues may feel judged or scrutinised.
- f.** After hearing a rumour that some staff members have received a salary increase, a teacher starts spreading this information, suggesting that the school is favouring certain employees. This creates tension and resentment among the staff, who feel unfairly treated. Gossip of this nature can foster a sense of inequality and mistrust within the school, damage morale, and undermine the school's efforts to maintain a fair workplace.

4. Specific Prohibitions

The following actions are strictly prohibited under this policy:

- a.** Sharing unverified information about any staff member's personal life or professional performance.
- b.** Discussing personal grievances or conflicts with colleagues rather than addressing them through appropriate channels.
- c.** Using gossip as a means to undermine colleagues, superiors, or the school.
- d.** Engaging in conversations that could be perceived as defamatory, discriminatory, or harassing.
- e.** Discussions or dissemination of information regarding the salaries and bonuses of other staff members.

5. Responsibilities of Staff

All staff members have a responsibility to contribute to a positive work environment by refraining from gossip. This includes:

- a.** Actively avoiding participation in gossip.
- b.** Challenging gossip if it occurs, either by redirecting the conversation or discouraging the behaviour.
- c.** Reporting persistent gossip to a line manager, Head of Stage, or Human Resources, particularly if it is harmful or discriminatory.

6. Reporting and Consequences

Any staff member found to be engaging in gossip, as defined in this policy, may be subject to disciplinary action. This could range from a verbal warning to more severe consequences, depending on the nature and impact of the gossip. Staff are encouraged to report incidents of gossip to their line manager, Head of Stage, or Human Resources without fear of retaliation.

7. Impact on Female Staff and Cultural Considerations

The school recognises the unique challenges faced by female staff in our cultural context. Gossip about female staff can have particularly severe social repercussions, including damage to personal and professional reputations, and can spread harmful labels and judgments. To address these issues, the school is committed to implementing disciplinary actions against those who engage in harmful gossip, ensuring that all staff, regardless of gender, feel safe, respected, and valued in their workplace.

8. Review and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the policy and suggest improvements to ensure it meets the needs of the school community.