



## Creating a mobile phone-free school environment

This document outlines what schools should consider when creating an environment free from mobile phones.

By the time pupils arrive at secondary school, ownership of mobile phones is ubiquitous – by the age of 12, 97% of children own a mobile phone.<sup>1</sup> The use of mobile phones in schools leads to distraction and disruption and can exacerbate misbehaviour and bullying. Many schools that have successfully implemented policies prohibiting the use of mobile phones report that their pupils feel safer and happier. Without access to their mobile phones and the unfiltered internet access provided, pupils can focus on the present, the people around them and their education. Without the disruption mobile phones cause, school staff can spend more time teaching and supporting pupils.



### The impact of mobile phones in schools

- 29% of secondary school pupils reported mobile phones being used without permission in most of their lessons.<sup>2</sup>
- One in five children have experienced bullying online.<sup>3</sup>
- Screen time can displace activities which have a positive impact on wellbeing such as socialising and exercise.<sup>4</sup>

## Developing a policy to prohibit the use of mobile phones in school

- All schools should develop and implement a policy that creates a mobile phone-free environment by prohibiting the use of mobile phones and other smart technology with similar functionality to mobile phones throughout the school day, including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.

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<sup>1</sup> [Children's Media Use and Attitudes Report 2023 - Ofcom](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Department for Education \(2023\) National Behaviour Survey: Findings from Academic Year 2021/22](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) \(2020\) Online bullying in England and Wales: year ending March 2020.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Royal College Paediatrics and Child Health \(2019\) The health impacts of screen time - a guide for clinicians and parents](#)

- The policy should reflect the school's individual context and needs and should make clear what rules pupils need to follow, what the consequences will be for breaching these rules, the role of staff in implementing the policy, and how reasonable adjustments and adaptations can be made for specific pupils who need them.
- Simple and clear rules which are easy to follow help pupils meet the expected behaviours and make it easy for all staff to consistently enforce the school's policy.
- Schools have legal duties to support pupils with medical conditions and to take reasonable steps to avoid disadvantage to a disabled pupil caused by the school's policies or practices on mobile phones. Schools should assess each case for adjustments or adaptations on its own merits.



### **How to implement a successful policy prohibiting the use of mobile phones in your school**

School leaders should develop and implement a policy to prohibit the use of mobile phones and other similar devices which reflects their school's individual contexts and needs. This will depend on several factors including the size of the school, and the age and needs of all pupils. Examples of successful approaches include:

- No mobile phones on the school premises
- Mobile phones handed into staff on arrival at school
- Mobile phones kept in secure location, which the pupil does not access throughout the school day
- Mobile phones are never used, seen or heard whilst at school

## **Communicating your approach to the school community**

- Communicating the school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones to all parents, pupils and staff is an important way of building and maintaining the school's culture and makes expectations transparent to all. This includes regular reminders about the school's policy and the consequences for breaching it, especially at the start of the new year and term.
- Parents should be made aware of the school's mobile phone policy and the reasons behind it. Where parents need to contact their child during the school day, they should be directed to the school office or equivalent. For more advice on communicating with parents see the toolkit for schools.
- Pupils should be educated about the risks associated with the use of mobile phones, both in school and more broadly, and the benefits of a mobile phone-free

environment for education and socialising. This helps pupils understand the decision being taken by their school to prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day.

## Implementing your policy on the use of mobile phones

- School staff should consistently enforce the school's policy on mobile phones. Staff should teach and model expected behaviour, so that pupils can see examples of good habits and are confident to ask for help when needed.
- Staff should respond consistently, promptly and assertively in accordance with the school's behaviour policy to any breaches of the mobile phone policy. The Department for Education's (DfE) '[Behaviour in schools](#)' guidance provides advice on the lawful use of sanctions. The DfE backs headteachers to confiscate mobile phones and similar devices for the length of time they deem proportionate.

## The use of mobile phones outside the school day

- Schools should determine how they wish to manage the use of mobile phones by pupils on residential trips or trips outside of the normal school day. Schools should ensure that pupils' educational experience on a school trip is not disrupted by the presence of mobile phones and should consider prohibiting or restricting their use.
- Schools should liaise with local authorities to promote good behaviour on school transport, e.g. school buses or alternative school transport, and this might include the development of expectations and restrictions around mobile phone use.
- Prohibiting the use of mobile phones in school will not eliminate all online harms and schools should consider the policy on mobile phones alongside their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children as described in [Keeping children safe in education](#). Schools should remain vigilant to risks relating to online safety and should ensure that online safety is reflected in all appropriate school policies.