



Department
for Education

Case studies for prohibiting the use of mobile phones in schools

Case study 1 – primary school

Pupils are not allowed to bring mobile phones to school, unless they are in older year groups and their parents want them to have mobile phones for their short walk to and from school. These pupils must hand in their switched off mobile phones at the start of the school day to their class teacher and they can collect them when they leave. Phones are kept in a safety box in a locked cupboard.

We have had a pupil who used their mobile phone to monitor their blood glucose levels to manage their diabetes. We agreed with parents that this pupil could bring a mobile phone to school which only had the technology needed for their health care installed – other applications on the mobile phone were deactivated. The pupil did not carry the mobile phone on them but could regularly check their blood sugar levels on their phone throughout the school day. This was closely monitored by a trained class teacher/First Aider.

We complement our policy on mobile phones with continuous work educating pupils and parents about the safe use of social media. We embed online safety throughout our curriculum and assemblies. We want our pupils to leave our school knowing about the risks in the online world, how they can keep themselves safe, and what responsibilities they have.

Parents need support too. We have a weekly blog with advice on safeguarding, understanding parental controls and recommending useful websites to parents. We have had to be creative in finding ways to get the message across as not all parents engage with the workshops we put on. Before pupil performances at school, which parents like to attend, we now deliver a short online safety session. Consistently communicating a message about online safety at school events and in newsletters helps to remind parents of the importance of the issue and can help a family introduce measures to keep their child safe online at home.

Reiterating simple messages frequently helps the whole school community understand that this is an important issue which needs to be taken seriously.

Case study 2 – secondary school

We are a large secondary school with a sixth form (c. 1200 pupils). We have a simple policy that mobile phones must never be seen or heard. If they are, they are confiscated. After the first offence, their mobile phone will be returned at the end of the next working day. Any further confiscations can last one week including the weekend.

We confiscate around 3 mobile phones a day from pupils in years 7-11. Pupils are understandably upset about losing their mobile phone – this is a sanction which should act as a deterrent – but most hand over their mobile phone without trouble. Occasionally, if a pupil resists an instruction to hand over their mobile phone further sanctions will be used according to the school's behaviour policy.

We have a separate sixth-form site, and here sixth-form pupils are allowed to use their mobile phone during set times and places on this site. However, they must follow the same rules as younger pupils when on the main site. This is important in reinforcing consistent expectations. Likewise, staff are only permitted to use their mobile phone in front of pupils for work specific reasons. This helps teachers across the school consistently implement the school's policy.

Our policy is clear that reasonable adjustments should be made for pupils that need them, and this extends to any sanctions, as required.

Our clear and simple policy ensures that mobile phones and the risks associated with them do not negatively impact the school environment. This helps protect pupils by removing the temptation during the school day to be drawn into potentially harmful behaviour on mobile phones.

Case study 3 – secondary school

We have a zero-tolerance policy on mobile phones in school which we implemented from day one. Pupils cannot bring them to school which means they cannot carry them to or from school either. We make this policy very clear at open evenings, transition days and induction at the start of term. By repeating this message parents are aware of the school's policy on mobile phones when they decide to send their child to our school. Parents are required to sign a family-academy contract which clearly sets out that parents should ensure their child does not bring a mobile phone to school and the consequences if they do. This clear position helps us avoid time consuming conversations with pupils and parents as they know what the school policy is and helps us ensure that when a sanction is issued for being in possession of a mobile phone it is reasonable.

In very exceptional circumstances, exemptions to the policy are allowed. These are carefully planned and follow the recommendation of a professional. For example, in a serious safeguarding case a pupil was allowed a mobile phone during school time

following a letter from a social worker. A pupil with type 1 diabetes uses a mobile phone to monitor glucose levels, however this mobile phone has limited functionality and only the applications needed are installed.

We enforce this policy by regularly spot-checking bags, with the pupils' consent. Each time a bag is checked, regardless of whether a mobile phone is found, we inform parents. If a mobile phone is found in a search or at any other time, then it can be confiscated until the end of term and the pupil receives a one-hour detention. If a mobile phone makes a noise in class, all pupils' bags in the vicinity of the noise are searched unless a pupil owns up. This happens very rarely. We will return the mobile phone at the end of term following a discussion with parents. If the parents require the sim card for contact details, we will return this before the end of term.

On average, we confiscate one mobile phone per week. We know that more pupils have mobile phones in school because we see them using their mobile phone outside school. This information is used to search pupils' bags the following day.

Whilst we are managing to successfully protect our pupils from the dangers of mobile phones when they are in school, we are aware that online behaviour by pupils outside of school creates pastoral issues which we need to address.

Case study 4 – all-through alternative provision school

We consulted with the student council, parents and families when making the decision to prohibit the use of mobile phones from the school day. There was lots of resistance to the change. Pupils felt they needed their mobile phones and couldn't imagine a day without them. We explicitly explained the benefits that could be gained from not allowing pupils access to their mobile phones during the school day.

When we introduced the mobile phone policy, we required that pupils hand in their mobile phones to tutors at the start of the day. Overnight there was a positive impact on the school environment but introducing the new approach was challenging. Pupils still tried to smuggle their mobile phones into school.

Each term the mobile phone policy became easier to implement and the benefits more widely appreciated by pupils. We introduced lockers with charging points. This worked as an incentive as pupils could go home with a fully charged mobile phone.

Within one year the whole culture of the school had changed, and enforcing the policy is no longer so challenging. If there is an emergency, parents can contact the school and outreach workers who can help support the young person in responding to the situation. Parents are supportive and trust the school to contact them in an emergency. Some parents have told us that knowing that they won't hear from their child during the school day provides them with peace of mind.

Prohibiting the use of mobile phones from the school day is a crucial part of our approach to creating a psychologically safe environment. Without access to their mobile phones, our pupils are protected from lots of background noise which can be very distracting – including cyberbullying, accessing pornography, county lines and online interactions which negatively impact their wellbeing. When a pupil does try and smuggle a mobile phone into school this in itself provides helpful information which might inform a safeguarding concern about the pupil.

Without access to their mobile phones, pupils have the headspace and calm environment to learn, and staff have the quiet and focus to teach. In addition, pupils now have to interact in person during unstructured time. They have learned to interact socially, enjoying face to face conversations, and interacting with staff during unstructured time. Stronger relationships are built through this which has helped improve our pupils' communication.

We have a safer, happier culture in our school, with better relationships between pupils and staff, and pupils experience more joy at school.

Case study 5 – secondary-aged special school

We are a specialist secondary school for over 350 pupils, teaching children with a wide range of special educational needs and difficulties, including autism spectrum disorder and moderate, severe, profound and complex learning difficulties. Our policy is that pupils should not have their mobile phone on them at school. We made the decision to adopt this policy because we believe children need time away from their mobile phones for several reasons, including creating a safe environment in which they can focus on learning and to remove distraction and disruption from the use of social media.

Most of our children do not need to bring a mobile phone with them to school, and those who do have a specific reason, such as a longer journey to and from school. For those that require a mobile phone, we introduced a contract which needs to be signed to assure prior agreement between pupil, parents and teachers before a mobile phone can be brought to school and handed in to staff at reception.

We implement a policy where mobile phones are collected by the office and stored safely by staff. These interactions help us to pinpoint children who may own more than one mobile phone that could indicate they are at risk outside of school and ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place.

Mobile phones are returned at the end of the school day, and we expect pupils to only use their mobile phone after they have left the site to maintain a phone-free environment. If a pupil is seen misusing a device on-site or on the way to the school bus, we will then confiscate it and only return directly to a parent.

Our parents are supportive of our approach, and we believe this is because we regularly communicate our mobile phone policy as a vital part of our wider school culture, the risks and reasons behind it and the benefits that come from having a phone-free school day.

Because we have pupils with a range of needs, including some severe or profound learning difficulties, technology is often used to support them. However, we firmly believe that this technology should be provided by the school or, where it can't be, is not accessed through a mobile phone. For instance, some of our children use augmentative and alternative communication devices, referred to in school as "talkers", for assistance speaking to teachers and peers and developing speech and language. These are designed for a specific purpose, as opposed to a device with many different apps that could be a distraction to learning.

Where an issue may arise during the school day, we want pupils to contact a member of staff with their concern first so we can support them, and then, if required, we would then contact home should the need arise.

Ultimately, by making sure that our pupils understand the policy, they regularly see clear benefits which are appreciated by all pupils and staff. As a result of this, we find that very few pupils try to access a mobile phone during the school day and that therefore they very rarely cause disruption or distract from learning.