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Department for Education

Guidance

# Creating a mobile phone-free environment: school case studies

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**Applies to England**

Contents

# Case study 1: a secondary school where mobile phones are stored in pouches

# Mobile phone policy

As a large secondary school with over 1,300 pupils, it is important that our approach to mobile phones is consistent and easy to understand.

All pupils must place their turned-off mobile phone into a lockable pouch, which stays on their person and can only be accessed at the end of the school day.

# Why we chose this policy

Although our consistent behaviour management systems meant that visible mobile phone use was low, we decided to take this step after reviewing data that could point to hidden mobile phone use, such as an increase in children leaving the classroom during lesson time.

By choosing pouches, we have tried to encourage pupils to give thought to their mobile phone use. We acknowledge that mobile phones, and smartphones in particular, can be addictive for all children and therefore adding further barriers (such as a locked pouch) can contribute to removing any distraction or temptation.

To ensure that our policy is successful, it is important to treat the mobile phone pouches in the same way that we would treat any other piece of essential equipment, like pens or a calculator. This means that we expect pupils to carry this with them to ensure that they are ready to learn every day.

# Communicating the policy

In terms of communicating our policy, it has been vital to get the buy-in of parents. To achieve this, there has been a longer-term programme of work around online safety and a sense of collaborative work to protect pupils from any potential online harms, while also making sure that pupils are not isolated from a mobile phone where they may need one for safety, such as on their journey to and from school. By supporting parents rather than working in conflict, it has been possible to foster a shared approach to mobile phones in school, screen time and teaching around wider online harms.

## Impact

The introduction of pouches, as opposed to a wholesale banning of children bringing a mobile phone to school at all, has meant that a perception of safety outside of the school gates is retained without compromising the ambition to create and maintain a mobile phone-free school environment.

# Case study 2: a secondary school with a phased, new approach to mobile phones

## Mobile phone policy

We have had a policy restricting the use of mobile phones in school for several years however, from 2025, we have decided to go further by gradually removing smartphones from our school site entirely.

To achieve this, children in year 7 are now only permitted to have what we call a "simple" (or brick) phone. Every September, this policy will be implemented with our new starters until we are completely smartphone-free.

## Why we chose this policy

Our approach to mobile phones is very strong, because we know the distractions that even one device can cause to the learning of an entire class of children. All pupils must also ensure that their mobile phone is switched off and stored in a pouch. We have chosen to not use lockable, magnetic pouches, and instead have implemented a system using pouches similar in material and size to a pencil case. We have found, thanks to our strong behaviour culture, that this acts as enough of a deterrent, particularly when staff are able to clearly identify that mobile phones are placed inside these pouches and placed on a desk.

## Enforcing the policy

On rare occasions where pupils do not follow the policy, or where a mobile phone is found following a spot check, devices can be confiscated for a week (longer in some circumstances) and can only be collected by a parent. Confiscation occurs immediately, the first time a mobile phone is used or found. All pupils understand this as soon as they join our school, thanks to our clear induction programme. We can take this strong stance due to the positive relationships we have built, over time, with families.

## Communicating the policy

We have found that parents are generally very supportive of our approach and we have been commended on this policy by both visitors and parents at open evenings.

By allowing our younger pupils (and, eventually, all pupils) to carry a mobile phone of some sort, we are confident that parents know their child continues to be safe on their journey to or from school, without creating unnecessary distractions throughout the school day.

Ultimately, we are extremely open about the high standards to which we hold our pupils at our school, and prospective parents are aware of the stance we take with mobile phones when choosing where to send their child. This openness has extended to our new simple-phone policy, as we felt there could have been more risk in communicating with parents if we had decided to implement the new approach for the entire school immediately. By adopting a gradual implementation process, we have been able to build a consensus and demonstrate the benefits both in and out of school.

# Case study 3: a bag-free secondary school has a consistent mobile phones policy

# Background

Mobile phones have not been a problem in our school since we first opened in 2012. This is as a result of a secure culture around behaviour, and wider school life, that naturally lends itself to supporting children to not want or need access to mobile phones during the school day.

Upon opening, one of our first firm decisions was to ensure that there would be no mobile phone use throughout the school building. At the time, mobile phones had not become the issue that they have since become for children and young people, but we understood that they didn't have a place in a learning environment.

# Mobile phone policy

When we set out to develop our policy on mobile phones over the years, we were clear that we want it to be simple and consistent – much like our approach to uniform. By keeping our expectations attainable and simple to understand, we are creating an environment where it is easy for all pupils to meet the basics and focus their full attention on academic achievement.

As a school, we are bag-free, which means that pupils only carry the materials they need for their next lessons. Everything else is stored in the pupils' own lockers, including coats, other equipment and mobile phones. Over time, we have created a culture by which pupils are not only unable to carry a mobile phone on their person, but that they also know they do not need one.

# Enforcing the policy

Throughout the school day, all transitions are managed and observed by multiple members of staff. This means that, even in the flow of the day, there are no opportunities arising for secret mobile phone use. This extends to lunchtimes and breaks, where a high staff to pupil ratio minimises the likelihood of misbehaviour while also building and maintaining staff and pupil relationships.

## Communicating the policy

As a school, we are very responsive to parents, in that, should a parent need to contact their child, we will always facilitate that through our school office. This reassures all of our families that, if there is a need, we will not stand between parents and pupils speaking to one another.

By building that trusted relationship between all parties, we have not only removed any obligation to need a mobile phone for this contact but also built up a mutually beneficial relationship where pupils, parents and staff all truly know that they will be heard and supported should they need something.

# Case study 4: a secondary school where pupils hand in mobile phones

## Mobile phone policy

On arrival at our school, all pupils must hand their phone to their Year Group Manager. Our year groups are led by non-teaching members of staff, who are therefore able to dedicate time and energy to this portion of the school day on a consistent basis – something that teaching members of staff might be unable to do on a daily basis as a result of the fluidity of school life.

## Why we chose this policy

We took the decision to separate pupils from their mobile phones due to the disruption that we know can be caused by mobile phones in school – often, incidents that have occurred in online spaces outside of school can be brought into school anyway, and this is before pupils are given the opportunity to exacerbate these issues with access to their mobile phones after they have arrived on site.

Secondly, we understand that there is a logistical and liability risk for all pupils, should they choose to carry a mobile phone on their person. By school taking the decision to take care of these devices throughout the day, our pupils understand that their phone is securely stored in a safe and will be taken care of while they focus on their learning.

## Enforcing the policy

While we are proud of our strong behaviour culture, inevitably there are rare occasions where mobile phones are seen and need to be confiscated. Pupils all know that, irrespective of where they are in school or which lesson they are in, the consequences they receive will be consistent. Where mobile phones are seen or used at our school, they are immediately confiscated and returned at the end of the day. However, where pupils consistently break this rule, we will implement a mobile phone ban, where they must hand their device into the office directly every morning.

We understand that there are safeguarding risks that can be associated with possession or use of a mobile phone in school, which is why we would treat any refusal to hand a mobile phone in as a matter initially for the pastoral team to support on to ensure that parental partnerships are used effectively and are protected.

Our expectations are simple, clear and high, which is what results in us being able to effectively gather mobile phones from our pupils and ensure their safety every day, enabling our pupils to focus on learning and meeting our high standards.

# Case study 5: a primary school that collects mobile phones at the school gates

## Mobile phone policy

Our primary school operates a clear and consistent mobile phone policy where pupils are not permitted to bring mobile phones into school.

Exceptions are made for children who walk to school independently. These pupils must hand their mobile phone in to a senior leader at the gate, placing it in a basket for safekeeping. Pupils below Year 6 do not walk home alone, so there is no need for anyone in the lower year groups to have a mobile phone.

We also make exceptions for pupils with medical needs. For example, last year a pupil with diabetes required access to his mobile phone to monitor their blood glucose levels. In this case, the phone was managed by a member of staff, and we explained to his peers why an exemption to the rule was being made on this occasion.

## Why we chose this policy

We have made a conscious decision to take this responsibility away from classroom teachers, reducing the stress of daily collection and preventing issues such as lost devices.

Staff model the same expectations, and we ask that if they need to use their mobile phone during the school day, they do so in a private space. Parents are also asked to keep mobile phones out of sight when collecting their children.

## Enforcing the policy

We conduct spot checks to ensure compliance, and any mobile phone brought in without permission is confiscated and collected by parents at the end of the day.

We complement our policy by providing parents with resources and guidance on online safety and healthy relationships. We feel this approach empowers families to address issues that may originate at home, ensuring our pupils thrive in a safe and focused learning environment.

# Case study 6: a primary school where no mobile phones are allowed on site

# Mobile phone policy

Mobile phones are not permitted in school unless an arrangement has been agreed with the governing body. We have had this policy for a long time and find that it works well for our school community.

Exceptions are granted only for medical reasons or where a pupil has a long journey to and from school. In these cases, the mobile phone is stored securely with the senior leadership team or in the main office, ensuring the pupil does not have access during the school day.

# Why we chose this policy

This policy is rooted in our concerns about the impact of mobile phones and social media on children's mental health, relationships, and learning. We believe there is no educational need for primary pupils to have mobile phones during school hours.

Removing mobile phones from the school environment helps reduce distractions, prevent online conflicts, and protect pupils from exposure to unregulated content.

We also recognise that bringing expensive devices into school can create inequality and increase safety risks for vulnerable pupils.

# Communicating the policy

We work closely with parents to promote healthy digital habits, offering workshops on online safety, parental controls, and the importance of shared device use in family spaces rather than behind closed doors.

Pupils do not bring mobile phones to school, and parents are reminded regularly of this expectation. We have found that parental pushback has been minimal. While we acknowledge safety concerns where parents feel their child does need a mobile phone to travel to and from school, we apply a clear and transparent process to any exemptions to ensure fairness.

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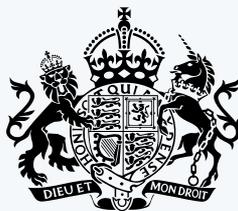
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