



Department
for Education

Mobile phones in schools

**Guidance for schools on prohibiting the
use of mobile phones throughout the
school day**

February 2024

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Foreword

Every school has a duty to create an environment that is calm, safe and free from distraction so all pupils, whatever their background, can learn and thrive. One of the greatest challenges facing schools is the presence of mobile phones. Today, by the age of 12, 97% of pupils own a mobile phone.¹

Mobile phones risk unnecessary distraction, disruption and diversion. One in three secondary school pupils report that mobile phones are used in most lessons without permission.² This not only distracts the single pupil using the phone, but disrupts the lesson for a whole class, and diverts teachers' efforts away from learning.

We owe it to our children to do what we can to remove distractions and enable them to be fully present and engaged in the classroom. We also owe it to our pupils to keep them safe at school. One in five pupils have experienced bullying online.³ By removing mobile phones from the school day, we can create a safe space where pupils are protected from the risks and dangers associated with social media and cyber-bullying, as well as the peer pressure and possible stigma associated with owning what are often expensive devices.

This is why we are determined that all schools should prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day – not only during lessons but break and lunchtimes as well.

Three in ten pupils cite making and maintaining friendships and their mental health as a cause of worry, anxiety or depression.⁴ By removing mobile phones, children and young people can spend more time staying active and socialising face to face with their peers, activities which have a positive impact on wellbeing.⁵ Schools can help children and young people develop these habits, which will in turn help them thrive outside of school.

During recent stakeholder engagement, headteachers and leaders reported that after removing mobile phones from the school day, the whole culture of the school changes for the better. The environment becomes safer, protecting pupils not only from the short-term distraction of a notification but also the background noise of their lives outside school. Without their mobile phone at school, pupils have the headspace and calm to focus on their lessons.

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

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

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

⁴ [Department for Education \(2023\) National Behaviour Survey: Findings from Academic Year 2021/22](#)

⁵ [Royal College Paediatrics and Child Health \(2019\) The health impacts of screen time - a guide for clinicians and parents](#)

Currently, there is a large variation in how different schools are managing the use of mobile phones. There is considerable good practice, including schools with exemplary behaviour cultures that are already implementing and enforcing tight restrictions. However, despite the best efforts of staff, in some settings, the use of mobile phones remains a daily battle. In support of teachers and leaders, this guidance sets out how all schools can effectively implement a policy to prohibit mobile phones from school throughout the school day.

This is about achieving clarity and consistency in practice, backing headteachers and leaders and giving staff confidence to act. In doing so, it sits alongside our Behaviour in Schools guidance, as well as recently updated guidance on teaching online safety within the curriculum, and support and training materials to help all schools deliver high quality relationships, sex and health education including around using technology safely and online harms.

This action goes alongside wider intervention to protect children from online harms outside of school too, with a vital role also for parents and carers, as well as the responsibilities of social media platforms and internet service providers. The Government's Online Safety Act 2023 is the most comprehensive piece of online safety legislation anywhere globally. By putting protections for children first, it will make Britain the safest place in the world to be a child online, including by taking a zero-tolerance approach to protecting children from the most harmful content and activity.

Today's children are growing up in an increasingly complex world, living their lives on and offline. This presents many exciting opportunities – but also challenges. By prohibiting mobile phones, schools can create safe and calm environments free from distraction so all pupils can receive the education they deserve.

Gillian Keegan

Secretary of State for Education

About this guidance

This publication provides guidance to individual schools and trusts on how to develop, implement and maintain a policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones throughout the school day.

This non-statutory guidance should be considered alongside the [behaviour in schools](#) guidance which supports schools in establishing calm, safe and supportive environments conducive to teaching, and [keeping children safe in education](#). This guidance should not be taken as a complete or definitive statement of the law nor as a substitute for the relevant legislation. Legal advice should be sought as appropriate.

Where the text uses the word 'parent,' it should be read as inclusive of carers and any person with parental responsibility.

When taking this guidance into consideration, references to 'mobile phones' should also be taken to refer to other communications and smart technology which the school has decided to include in their policy.

Expiry or review date

This guidance will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- school leaders, school staff, governing bodies, trust boards and proprietors in all maintained schools, academies, free schools, non-maintained special schools and independent schools in England
- local authorities
- for the purposes of this guidance, references to "maintained school" mean a community, foundation or voluntary school, community or foundation special school, and maintained nursery school. It also means pupil referral units
- for the purpose of this guidance, references to "academy" means academy schools (including mainstream and special free schools) and alternative provision academies (including alternative provision free schools)
- for the purpose of this guidance, references to "schools" means all schools whether maintained, non-maintained or independent schools (including academies, free schools and alternative provision academies), maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units

Prohibiting the use of mobile phones in school

All schools should have a behaviour policy⁶ which is aligned with the school's legal duties and standards relating to the welfare of children. This is essential in establishing and maintaining high standards of behaviour ensuring that teachers can deliver the curriculum and that the school is a calm and safe environment for all pupils and staff. As part of this policy, schools should develop a mobile phone policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones and other smart technology with similar functionality to mobile phones (for example the ability to send and/or receive notifications or messages via mobile phone networks or the ability to record audio and/or video) throughout the school day, including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.

Where schools have a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) scheme to facilitate the use of laptops or tablets for learning, such devices should be used in accordance with the school's BYOD policy and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) acceptable use policy. BYOD policies should not include mobile phones.

Boarding schools and residential schools should prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the teaching day. They should develop appropriate policies regarding the use of mobile phones during the rest of their pupils' time at school, which safeguards and promotes the welfare of the children in their care in accordance with the [boarding schools: national minimum standards](#) and [residential special schools: national minimum standards](#). This includes facilitating arrangements so boarders can contact their parents and families in private, at a time that is suitable for both parties, considering relevant time zones for international pupils.

Schools should consider whether pupils in the sixth form should be permitted access to their mobile phone at certain and limited times and locations, reflecting this period of education as one of increased independence and responsibility, without compromising the school's policy on the use of mobile phones for other pupils. This should include prohibiting the use of mobile phones by sixth-form pupils in front of younger pupils, for example limiting use to a sixth-form common room. Sixth-form pupils should remain subject to the school's behaviour policy and misuse of their phone should have the potential to lead to sanctions.

Developing a policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones

It is for school leaders to develop and implement a tailored policy on the use of mobile phones and other similar devices.

⁶ [Behaviour in schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

A school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones can be included within the school's behaviour policy or be its own standalone document. The policy should be accessible, aligned with the school's culture, consistent and straightforward to follow. The implementation of the policy should support all pupils to meet the expectations of behaviour relating to mobile phones.

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 age and needs of all pupils. The following examples illustrate different ways in which a mobile phone-free environment can be achieved. This is not an exhaustive list, and, in all cases, schools should have regard to the guidance regarding reasonable adjustments and adaptations to their policy for specific pupils as set out in this guidance.

- a) **No mobile phones on the school premises** – A school may decide that no mobile phones should be brought to school by its pupils, and they must be left at home or with parents. This policy provides a very simple boundary which is straightforward to enforce as any mobile phone found at school would be in breach of the policy.
- b) **Mobile phone handed in on arrival** – A school may decide that its pupils may require access to their mobile phones before and after school, but they do not want pupils to have access to their mobile phones throughout the school day. On entry to the school each pupil hands in their device to school staff and these are then collected at the end of the school day. Schools should be mindful that even if a pupil has handed in one mobile phone, they may have another mobile phone in their possession.
- c) **Mobile phones kept in secure location, which the pupil does not access throughout the school day** – Some schools may have established bag-free days where personal possessions are kept in lockers, or similar secure storage. If mobile phones are brought to the school, at the start of the school day they should be put straight into lockers or similar secure storage and not be accessed by the pupil until the end of the day.
- d) **Never used, seen or heard** – Some schools may choose to adopt a policy where pupils keep possession of their mobile phones only on the strict condition that they are never used, seen or heard – with consequences for breaching this that are sufficient to act as an effective deterrent. It is important that schools enforce this policy vigorously, consistently and visibly, to the effect that mobile phone use is prohibited throughout the school day. To support this, it may be appropriate for a school to ensure that parents and pupils clearly understand the sanctions that may be applied, to establish a strong no-phone culture. Schools will often stipulate that the mobile phone is switched off at the bottom of the school bag; confiscation may be an immediate consequence otherwise. As this

policy becomes established through consistent application, the culture of the school will change, with pupils less likely to attempt to use their phones.

Communicating the policy to pupils and parents

Communicating the school behaviour policy, including the school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones, to all members of the community is an important way of building and maintaining the school's culture and makes expectations transparent to all. School leaders should ensure that all staff, pupils and parents are familiar with the policy and how it is implemented.

Schools should publish details of the school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones. A toolkit for schools on communicating the school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones is available on gov.uk.

The role of staff

All staff should consistently enforce the school's policy on the use of mobile phones. Staff should not use their own mobile phone for personal reasons in front of pupils throughout the school day. This will empower staff to better challenge pupils to meet the school expectations and effectively enforce the prohibition of mobile phones throughout the school day. There may be occasions where it is appropriate for a teacher to use a mobile phone or similar device, for instance to issue homework, issue rewards and sanctions or use multi-factor authentication.

The role of pupils

All pupils should be clear on the school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones and should be reminded of the policy, and the consequences and sanctions for not following it, at the start of each school year and again, where appropriate, at regular intervals.

Pupils should be taught the risks that are associated with the use of mobile phones, both in school and more broadly, to ensure they understand the decision being taken by their school to prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day. These risks can include a loss of focus in lessons, classroom disruption and an increase in bullying. Pupils should also be taught the benefits of having a mobile phone-free environment and be encouraged to see such an environment as desirable and valuable. This will help to create intrinsic motivation to support the school culture.

The role of parents

Parents have an important role in supporting the school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones and should be encouraged to reinforce and discuss the policy at home as appropriate, including the risks associated with mobile phone use and the benefits of a mobile phone-free environment.

Where parents need to contact their child during the school day, they should be directed to the school office, where staff should be aware of the school's policy on relaying messages and facilitating contact.

Where parents have questions or concerns, staff should address these in a timely manner and clearly communicate the reasons for prohibiting the use of mobile phones.

The use of sanctions

The Department for Education (DfE) provides guidance on how schools can use sanctions lawfully in the [behaviour in schools](#) guidance. Schools can use a range of sanctions for breaching the mobile phone policy appropriate to their context, including confiscation and detentions.

Schools have the power to confiscate mobile phones or similar devices as a disciplinary penalty. The law protects staff from liability in any proceedings brought against them for any loss or damage to items they have confiscated as a sanction, providing they have acted lawfully. Staff should consider whether the confiscation is proportionate and consider any special circumstances relevant to the case.

Headteachers are backed by the DfE to confiscate mobile phones and similar devices for the length of time they deem proportionate. In considering whether a confiscation is a proportionate penalty, schools should consider what disciplinary outcome the confiscation is intended to achieve and whether there are other ways to achieve the same outcome. Confiscation as a sanction can be an effective deterrent for a specific pupil or a general deterrent for all pupils at the school.

In considering whether a sanction is reasonable, one must consider whether it is proportionate in the circumstances of the case and consider any special circumstances relevant to its imposition including the pupil's age, any religious requirements affecting them and any special educational needs or disability (SEND) they may have (see section on responding to the behaviour of pupils with SEND in [behaviour in Schools](#) guidance).

Schools should consider whether the misbehaviour gives cause to suspect that a pupil is suffering, or may be at risk of, harm. Where this may be the case, as set out in [part 1 of keeping children safe in education](#), school staff should follow the school's child protection policy and speak to the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy). They will consider if pastoral support, an early intervention or a referral to children's social care is appropriate.

Searching pupils

Headteachers, or staff they authorise, have a statutory power to search a pupil or their possessions where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil is in possession of a prohibited item as set out in legislation⁷ or any item identified in the school rules as an item that may be searched for. Headteachers can and should identify mobile phones and similar devices as something that may be searched for in their school behaviour policy. Staff should refer to the [searching, screening and confiscation in schools](#) guidance regarding searching a pupil.

Adaptations and reasonable adjustments

Whilst schools should prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day to reduce distraction and disruption, they must comply with duties such as the duty to make reasonable adjustments where necessary. There may be other exceptional circumstances where schools should consider making adaptations to their policy for specific pupils. This guidance does not provide an exhaustive list of exceptional circumstances, and schools should assess each case on its own merits.

Schools have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to take such steps as is reasonable to avoid substantial disadvantage to a disabled pupil caused by the school's policies or practices. Allowing a disabled pupil access to their mobile phone during the school day, where it is necessary due to the nature of their disability, may be considered a reasonable adjustment and a failure to do so may be a breach of the school's duty.

Maintained schools and academies have a duty under the Children and Families Act 2014 to have arrangements in place to support pupils with medical conditions. In meeting this duty the governing body, proprietor or management committee must have regard to the statutory guidance [supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#). In some circumstances, supporting a pupil with their medical condition can involve the use of a mobile phone. For example, pupils with diabetes might use continuous glucose monitoring with a sensor linked to their mobile phone to monitor blood sugar levels. Where mobile phone use allows pupils to manage their medical condition effectively, it would not be reasonable for a school to prevent this.

Beyond these specific duties, schools should recognise that a need for mobile phone access for some pupils may depend on their individual circumstances, including at home.

⁷ A 'prohibited item' is defined in subsection (3) of [section 550ZA of the Education Act 1996](#) and includes articles specified in [The Schools \(Specification and Disposal of Articles\) Regulations 2012](#).

Schools should allow flexibility in their policy for these pupils and consider including arrangements in other relevant policies (such as a young carers policy).

Allowing flexibility for individual pupils does not mean that these pupils should be exempt from all restrictions on the use of their mobile phone. Schools should develop practices which enable pupils to use their mobile phone for a specific purpose at specific times and locations, for example in a Head of Year's office.

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.

If a decision is made to prohibit mobile phones from the school premises entirely, schools should consider the impact on children travelling to and from school where not having a mobile phone poses a risk or the perception of a risk. Schools are encouraged to consult with parents to develop such a policy, considering ways to mitigate specific concerns and build support for this approach.

Schools should remain vigilant to risks relating to online safety and should ensure that online safety is reflected in all appropriate school policies. Schools should ensure that pupils are able to access their mobile phone where necessary when raising concerns with teachers about issues which have occurred online. This is particularly important in residential settings. The communication of the details of the school's policy on the use of mobile phones in school can be a good opportunity to raise the issue of online safety with parents. For further information, see sections in [behaviour in schools](#) guidance on online behaviour incidents and [keeping children safe in education](#) and the DfE's guidance on [teaching online safety in schools](#).



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