



Department  
for Education

Guidance

# Mobile phones in schools

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**Applies to England**

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phones-in-schools/mobile-phones-in-schools>

# About this guidance

This publication provides guidance to individual schools and trusts on how to implement a policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones throughout the school day, including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.

This non-statutory guidance should be considered alongside the [behaviour in schools guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools--2>) 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.

## Prohibiting the use of mobile phones in school

All schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default; anything other than this should be by exception only.

All schools must have a [behaviour policy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools--2>) 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 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 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/boarding-schools-national-minimum-standards\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/boarding-schools-national-minimum-standards) and [residential special schools: national minimum standards \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/residential-special-schools-national-minimum-standards\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/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 students 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 students in front of younger pupils, for example limiting use to a sixth-form common room. Sixth-form students should remain subject to the school's behaviour policy and misuse of their phone should have the potential to lead to sanctions.

Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure appropriate filtering and monitoring systems are in place and regularly reviewed, in line with keeping children safe in education, to prevent access to harmful or inappropriate content.

## Implementing a policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones

The Department for Education (DfE) expects schools to implement a policy whereby pupils do not have access to their mobile phone throughout the school day including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.

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. Effective implementation of the policy should ensure all pupils and parents understand and meet the expectations of behaviour relating to mobile phones.

There are a number of ways in which schools can ensure that they are mobile phone-free, and it is for headteachers to decide how best to achieve this within their own unique contexts.

Some schools have chosen to use lockers to store mobile phones and other equipment, ensuring that pupils still have access to a device for safety reasons when travelling to and from school. This ensures that any potential distractions from mobile phones are removed entirely during the school day. To prevent pupils from attempting to circumvent this policy, one secondary school ensures that buy-in from parents is gained prior to transition from primary school, and that all families are content to accept all of the school's policies. In return, the school ensures they are responsive to communication from home, where required, in their school office.

There are also schools who successfully facilitate pupils handing a mobile phone to staff at the start of the school day. Again, this allows all pupils to feel safe on their journey to and from school, while removing digital distraction for the entirety of the school day.

More examples of how schools have become mobile free are available from [creating a mobile phone-free environment: school case studies](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phones-in-schools/creating-a-mobile-phone-free-environment-school-case-studies) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phones-in-schools/creating-a-mobile-phone-free-environment-school-case-studies>).

## 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, how it is implemented and any sanctions for breaching it.

Schools should publish details of the school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones.

## 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. Responsible bodies and school leaders should be clear with staff on their expectations around use of mobile phones during the day.

## Expectations for 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.

DfE's guidance on [relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>) provides further information on how to ensure that pupils are safe online, including how their information and data can be shared and how to consider the effects of their online actions.

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. The policy should be clearly explained to parents, including the reasons behind the policy and the school's expectations. Parents should also 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

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 should feel confident to use their power to confiscate mobile phones or similar devices as a disciplinary penalty where their policy is clearly breached, for instance where a mobile phone is used by a pupil or is heard ringing in a pupil's bag. 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 DfE to confiscate mobile phones and similar devices, if they consider it proportionate, for whatever 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, as well as the pupil's individual circumstances such as age and SEND, as explained in the behaviour in schools guidance. Confiscation as a sanction can be an effective deterrent for a specific pupil or a general deterrent for all pupils at the school.

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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>), 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 legislation<sup>[footnote 1]</sup> 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/searching-screening-and-confiscation) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/searching-screening-and-confiscation>) guidance regarding searching a pupil.

# Adaptations and reasonable adjustments

Whilst schools are expected to prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day to reduce distraction and disruption, they must comply with their other legal 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](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>) 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](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents>) 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>). 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. 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.

When designing a policy to prohibit the use of mobile phones during the school day, 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 the sections on online behaviour incidents in:

- [behaviour in schools \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools--2\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-in-schools--2)
- [keeping children safe in education \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2)

- [teaching online safety in schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-online-safety-in-schools)  
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-online-safety-in-schools>)
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1. A 'prohibited item' is defined in subsection (3) of [section 550ZA of the Education Act 1996](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/550ZA)  
(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/550ZA>) and includes articles specified in [The Schools \(Specification and Disposal of Articles\) Regulations 2012](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/951/made). (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/951/made>)



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