

MOBILE PHONE POLICY

2024-25

Reviewed October 2024

ST CIARAN'S COLLEGE

Including Everyone, Inspiring all to Succeed



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RATIONALE

Mobile phones or any other recording device can be on occasion a cause for concern in school due to:

- Privacy and Safeguarding issues arising from the picture and video recording. Images taken without a person's knowledge pictures can be taken before being transferred to other users including internet sites and social media platforms.
- Their use in cases of bullying where individuals encourage name calling either verbally or by text/picture/video messaging.
- The potential to distract students from their studies.
- The school having no control over outgoing calls which may be made for unnecessary or inappropriate purposes.
- The potential for theft/loss on the way to or from school of what can be an expensive item.
- The time-consuming nature of monitoring mobile phone use.

In October 2024, the current policy was reviewed using surveys with pupils, staff and parents, and a pupil focus group.

(Appendix II)

An increasing body of evidence indicates that even the presence of a mobile phone can have negative consequences for pupils' learning and achievement.

(Appendix III)

MISUSE OF PHONES

- Pupils are not permitted to use mobile phones in school. This includes during lessons and outside lessons. Phones should be turned off if they are brought to school by pupils. This reflects the “Never seen, never heard” option suggested by the Department in their September 2024 circular.

The Department advises that the personal use of pupil mobile phones and other similar devices should be restricted during the school day for the vast majority of pupils. This includes during lunch and recreational periods.

(Appendix I)

- Pupils found using mobile phones in school will be asked to give the phone to the staff member. This will be placed in an envelope in the office at reception.
- St. Ciaran’s Staff have the right to check phones for inappropriate content when confiscated.
- First Offence: phone confiscated and returned to a designated adult.
- Second Offence: phone confiscated and returned to a designated adult. However, the pupil will carry out an Extra Study After School.
- If a pupil refuses to hand over their phone contact will be made with parent/carer who will be asked to encourage the pupil to hand it over. If they continue to refuse it may lead to further consequences.

REVIEW

The Policy will be reviewed and updated annually in line with further guidance from DE.

APPENDICES

Appendix I

[Circular 2024-14 - Use of Personal Mobile Phones.pdf](#)

Mobile Phones & Learning – from DE Circular, September 2024-14

There are increasing concerns regarding the impact of mobile phones on children and young people's development. A number of studies have raised issues about the wider impact of phones on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Key issues associated with significant phone use by children and adolescents include social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation and addiction.

A number of recent findings are listed below:

- A report from the Children's Commissioner published in 2023 indicates that nearly a third of young people will have viewed inappropriate images/videos by age 11.
- The National Behaviour Survey (2021-2022) found that 29% of secondary school pupils (rising to 40% for key stage 4 pupils) reported mobile phones being used without permission in most of their lessons.
- Data from Office of National Statistics (2020) suggests that one in five children (19%) aged 10-15 experienced at least one type of bullying behaviour online, and out of them, around three quarters (72%) said they experienced at least some of it at school or during school time.
- Research by Ofcom has found that older children in the UK are more likely to be bullied on a screen than in person.
- A global study of nearly 30,000 young adults found a link between the age a child received their first smartphone and their mental health in young adulthood (Age of First Smartphone/Tablet and Mental Wellbeing Outcomes).

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- OECD's most recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 findings have indicated that 45% of students across OECD countries feel anxious if their phones are not near them.
 - Growing Up Online by the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement presented evidence that many children and young people are spending much greater amounts of time online (as much as seven hours per day during weekends and holidays and four hours or more on a school day). The impact of this high usage, as reported by the young people and confirmed by their teachers, was a growing trend for pupils to come in to school "wrecked" or "in a complete state" or with their "heads down... sleeping" in class.

Many of the concerns associated with phone use occur outside school premises beyond the school day and are a wider societal issue which require cross-cutting consideration. This reinforces the need for programmes in education that promote digital proficiency and the responsible use of technology.

There are risks associated with children and young people bringing their own personal mobile devices into schools. There is significant potential for misuse, both in terms of low-level disruption in classes and more serious misuse such as bullying and harassment of children and young people as well as staff. Such behaviour is unacceptable in any context. Such inappropriate use of this technology can also detract from their appropriate use in learning and can involve teaching staff, children and young people, and parents in investigations which can cause significant disruption to the school and wider community.

Research has found correlations between mobile phone restriction in schools and a range of positive outcomes, including reduced bullying, an overall reduction in social media usage, increased healthy play, reduced distraction and improved academic attainment. Overall, the academic evidence of the positive impact of prohibited use is increasing.

UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report, Technology in education: a tool on whose terms advises that "some education technology can improve some types of learning in some contexts" but "it should focus on learning outcomes" and that "mere proximity to a mobile device was found to distract students and to have a negative impact on learning".

In other words, even if a pupil switches their phone off, puts it in their bag and places that bag under their desk, the knowledge that their phone is close by still has the power to distract them. One study had found that it could take students up to 20 minutes to refocus on what they were learning after engaging in a non-academic activity.

The OECD highlights that one action that has demonstrable impact on outcomes is a ban on smartphones at school. The PISA data suggest that such bans can be effective, although as highlighted above - effectiveness depends on enforcement.

Appendix II

Parent survey:

- 83.6% of parents who responded (140) to a survey stated that they were happy with the current policy that pupils do not use mobile phones at any time in school. This reflects the “Never seen, never heard” option in the recent DE guidance.
- Some parents have concerns about mixed messages as some teachers asked pupils to use phones to complete quizzes or activities on learning apps.

Student Council focus group:

- 76% of pupils in the Student Council stated that the current school policy is their preferred option for mobile phone use.

Staff survey:

- 14 teachers responded to the survey.
- 43% of these responses indicated that the policy should remain the same.
- 4 of the respondents stated that phones should be used by pupils at the teacher’s discretion for research, educational apps, quizzes.
- Two teachers suggested that phones should be given to Form Teachers in the morning and returned at the end of the day.

Appendix III

Research on the impact of phone use in schools





RELATED RESEARCH

Excessive mobile phone use has been associated with a reduction in concentration (#30), an increase in the fear of missing out, heightened anxiety and stress, as well as hindering both memory and sleep (#40). Within classrooms, there is evidence to suggest that technology may not be the powerful answer that many were hoping for. For example, students who take notes on electronic devices remember less about their lesson and perform worse in exams (#72).

Likewise, even when given explicit instructions on how to use technology, many report reverting to playing games and browsing online. Finally, a separate study found that students who report being on their phones a lot go on to get worse grades. This finding was found to be true for all students, regardless of gender or previous grade average.

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS



Schools from around the world have started banning mobile phones. These include many in France, America and England. This study suggests that they have been right to do so. As the authors of this study note, “highly multipurpose technology, such as mobile phones, can have a negative impact on productivity through distraction. Schools that restrict access to mobile phones subsequently experience an improvement in test scores”.

They do conclude their study with a slight caveat, which is that they “do not discount the possibility that mobile phones could be a useful learning tool if their use is structured properly”. However, given that at this stage it is not clear what this proper structure looks like, it seems prudent to advise that when it comes to the banning of mobile phones, the positives of doing so outweigh the negatives.

This strategy may well be met with objections by both students and parents. Common arguments against doing so are that a) they are used as a safety device that allows students to get in touch with parents after school or b) that as this technology is part of the 21st century, schools should embrace it. The former argument can be countered as mobile phones can be turned on at the end of the school day, whereas the latter argument falls short given that, overall, mobile phones don't lead to better learning.