

Mobile Phone Policy

The Folkestone School for Girls Academy Trust is known as “the school” in this policy.

Never used, seen or heard

A mental health survey commissioned by the BBC asked 1000 boys and 1000 girls for their views. More than a quarter of teenagers polled said they feel anxious all or most of the time, with exams, going to school and peer pressure being the top three reasons. **More than half of male and female responses said they feel anxious when they don't have their phones with them. Conversely a third said comparing themselves to others on social media makes them anxious.**

So, anxious without their phones on them but anxious too about what they can access on them!

Responding to the survey, the Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, concludes **“it is clear that the online world and social media is having a very real impact on teenagers' mental health, their wellbeing, and their safety,”** Dame Rachel says.

Clearly school has an important role to play in supporting students to navigate these challenges and it is something that we at FSG work hard on.

DfE Guidance on mobile phones in schools' states:

“Every school has a duty to create an environment that is calm, safe and free from distraction so all students, 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 students own a mobile phone.

Mobile phones risk unnecessary distraction, disruption and diversion. One in three secondary school students report that mobile phones are used in most lessons without permission. This not only distracts the single student 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 students to keep them safe at school. One in five students have experienced bullying online. By removing mobile phones from the school day, we can create a safe space where students 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 students cite making and maintaining friendships and their mental health as a cause of worry, anxiety or depression. 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. 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 students 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, students have the headspace and calm to focus on their lessons.”

DfE Guidance suggest 4 possible strategies

- No mobile phones on the school premises
- Mobile phone handed in on arrival
- Mobile phones kept in secure location,
- Never used, seen or heard

At The Folkestone School for Girls we appreciate that a balance is to be struck; students can feel anxious without their mobile phones nearby and that is especially true on journeys to/from school. Parents too often want their child to have a mobile phone for that very reason, safety and security journeying to and from school. With a large number of students making long journeys to/from school on foot and by public transport mobile phones being in school are then, we believe, a reality to be managed.

Therefore, we have adopted a **never used, seen or heard** approach. Phones are to be switched off and stored in bags or blazer pockets throughout the school day, to be never used, seen or heard.

“Some schools may choose to adopt a policy where students 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 students 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 students less likely to attempt to use their phones”.

On rare occasions, at the direction of a teacher or member of staff, students may be asked or allowed to use their mobile phones - for example to complete an online survey or photograph a worked solution on a whiteboard. This will always be at the direction of, or under the permission of a member of staff.

Sixth Form

DfE Guidance states that 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 students. This should include prohibiting the use of mobile phones by sixth-form students in front of younger students, for example limiting use to a sixth-form common room. At FSG, sixth form students are permitted phones in designated sixth form areas and in the canteen area.

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 students throughout the school day. This will empower staff to better challenge students to meet the school expectations and effectively enforce the prohibition of mobile phones throughout the school day. However, 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 students

All students 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. Students 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. Students 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 student or a general deterrent for all students at the school.