

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.”**

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 was strengthened in January 2026 to state that **“All schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default; anything other than this should be by exception only.”**

That does not mean that students cannot bring phones to school, indeed many parents want their child to have a mobile phone for journeys to/from school and thus their presence in school is a reality to manage.

So, in acceptance of this reality, 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.”**

At FSG, 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, and across the school site, to be never used, seen or heard.

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 only.

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. At FSG staff phones are often used for communication on school trips or to photograph and record the rich curriculum offer.

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 direct messages to the appropriate SDL**, where staff can relay messages and/or facilitate contact.

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.**

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, as well as the pupil's individual circumstances such as age and SEND. Confiscation as a sanction can be an effective deterrent for a specific student or a general deterrent for all students at the school.

Adaptations & 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 students.

Allowing a disabled pupil access to their mobile phone during the school day, where it is necessary due to the nature of their disability or a young carer with responsibilities at home etc may be considered a reasonable adjustment. However, 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" so at FSG phone use may be limited to break/lunch or to an SDL 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 students' educational experience on a school trip is not disrupted by the presence of mobile phones and should consider prohibiting or restricting their use. At FSG we restrict usage on school trips but allow access at certain times under staff supervision for contact home (to update on arrival times for example) but we also allow students to capture photographs of key sites and/or friendship groups – again under staff supervision.

Tackling the mobile phone 'crisis' - an overarching approach

Most people would agree smartphones can cause real issues for many of us; adults and children alike, with an unhealthy amount of screen time notwithstanding some of the other pressures and challenges created by social media. At FSG though we've not adopted a policy of locking phones away in expensive pouches, but a different approach. We try, and largely succeed, in changing the phone culture of the children **all the time**, rather than just the culture **when at school**.

So, we've built a huge extra-curricular programme here at the school to offer alternative activities and to provide the girls with an opportunity to find their thing and find their tribe, in the real world. We have a massive CCF contingent, Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, huge opportunities in the performing arts, an escape room, archery, mountain biking trail, climbing wall, radio station etc.

Everything is oversubscribed and the students just aren't on their phones because they are out and about and active with friends. Interests and friendship groups expand, so the need to be online diminishes. Where phones are used they tend to be as cameras to capture the moments and memories of time spent with friends.

We've established a culture that at school that our girls sign up, take part, join in, stand out. They now are the type of people that do that out of school too.

- 400+ worked/working their way through Duke of Edinburgh at Bronze, Silver and Gold Award level; over 5500 volunteering hours (nearly 700 working days) paid back to our local community

through D of E just over the past few years. The social value of this is estimated, by DoE, to be £30,000+.

- 300+ Combined Cadet Force Contingent; Our contingent was awarded the Pooley Ceremonial Sword this year by central command; This past year alone some 180 cadets have been out on camps, one of our cadets has been appointed Lord-Lieutenant's Cadet for Kent and typically **75% of Year 7 will be new joiners.**
- National Citizenship Service. (the biggest cohort of any school, anywhere!) We are a Gold Champion Award School, No. 1 in fact! In Kent, there are 101 secondary schools. Across all of those, 510 students signed up for NCS, 104 of those from FSG! The average school had 4 sign up; we had 104!
- Crew and sail a tall ship, [TS Thalassa](#) across the English Channel! (Despite being 1 of 5 secondary schools in the district, 6 out of the 13 Shepway students selected were from FSG! **(All the girls were from FSG.)**)
- **3 out of 18 students nationwide on the 2024 JoLT expedition to Vietnam/Cambodia were from FSG.** There are over 4000 secondary schools in the UK. FSG is 1 of 4000+ schools and yet had 1 in 6 travellers! This was free to students.

The money saved in not buying pouches has been used in the above instead and whilst we absolutely do not claim that girls never use their phones, we do consider that we have helped them to find a good balance. At the heart of the school vision and ethos is a desire to create a curriculum not just for passing exams, but for life. A life well lived, in fact. Not just watching other people online - but instead creating our own adventures and opportunities.