

Renfrewshire Council

Children's Services

Guidance on the use of mobile phones for schools (Version 5)

Vision

'To enable all schools and local authorities to develop an ethos of citizenship that leads to respectful and responsible use of mobile technology. This will encourage schools to positively embrace mobile technology to enhance learning now and, in the future, whilst helping them protect staff, children and young people from the possible disruptive and harmful consequences of misuse.' Scottish Government "Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools" – Update 2024

Context

Mobile technology is an integral part of the lives of children and young people across Scotland, with many bringing their own mobile phone devices into school.

When used responsibly, mobile devices such as phones and tablets can be powerful tools to enhance learning and teaching, communication and social experience but it should also be recognised the significant challenges and impact these can have on children and young people. These devices may remove barriers to learning for some pupils. They can bring a sense of security to parents as their children enjoy more independent activities, such as walking to and from school unsupervised. Such devices can also be powerful tools when utilised by teachers to enhance learning and teaching.

There is a clear commitment to recognising, respecting and promoting children's rights in Scotland through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and any local decisions relating to the use of mobile devices in school should be made acting in the best interests of the child and taking their views into consideration.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to provide schools in Renfrewshire Council with advice on how to develop a local school policy that encourages safe and responsible use of personal mobile technology in school, and beyond, whilst encouraging schools to adopt a robust but measured response to their inappropriate use. This may include restrictions and limitations on the use of mobile phones in schools. These policies should also be designed to protect children and young people and staff from harassment and abuse which can arise from the misuse of such technology. They should include the move towards the promotion of positive relationships and behaviour in a digital context and the important role of educators in preparing children and young people to become "digital citizens".

Guiding Principles

- **Balance:** We recognise the potential benefits and risks of personal mobile technology use. Our approach aims to strike a balance that supports learning and teaching, whilst minimising disruption and harm.
- **Respect for Rights:** We uphold the rights of the child, including their right to express their views and participate in decisions that affect them. We respect the rights of staff and pupils to have a safe and conducive learning environment and recognise that these rights are interconnected. Consideration must be given to how they impact each other.
- **Whole School Community Involvement:** We will develop local policies in partnership with the whole school community engendering a sense of engagement, shared ownership and commitment.
- **Consistency:** Children and young people need to understand that unacceptable behaviour remains unacceptable whether it occurs in an online environment, the playground, the classroom or anywhere else. Expectations for responsible conduct remain consistent, regardless of the context, and any breach of expectations in relation to mobile technology should be treated in accordance with the school's policies. It is expected that staff will respond consistently to any irresponsible use of mobile technology and will explain to

children why certain behaviours are unacceptable, and what the potential impact of such behaviours might be. In line with this, policies on mobile phone technology must be rooted within existing positive, nurturing relationships or behaviour policies, which will set out how incidents will be dealt with.

- Features of a respectful and responsible use of mobile technology policy would fall within three broad categories:
 - digital rights and responsibilities (what individuals can and cannot do)
 - digital etiquette (standards of conduct when using mobile phones)
 - safe and secure use (precautions that can be taken to ensure digital safety)
- Further reading:
 - https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/125554/1/Smartphone_policies_in_schools_Rahali_et_al_2024_002_.pdf
 - <https://edexec.co.uk/unesco-urges-global-ban-on-smartphones-in-classrooms-to-enhance-learning-and-protect-children/>

Digital Rights and Responsibilities (what individuals can and cannot do)

- Unacceptable Behaviour: Unacceptable behaviour, whether online or offline, is not tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to, bullying, harassment and the sharing of inappropriate content.
- Consequences: Pupils who misuse their phone will be subject to the school's own positive relationships and behaviour policies, which already set out how incidents will be dealt with, including agreed consequences and sanctions. Consistency is key to the successful implementation.
- Reporting: Incidents of misuse should be reported by pupils to a teacher or member of staff and there should be clear protocols outlining the support available in school for staff and pupils who are the subject of harassment using mobile phones.

Digital Etiquette (standards of conduct when using mobile phones)

- Permitted Use: Mobile phones may be used in class for educational purposes when explicitly permitted by the class teacher. On arrival in class, phones should be stored in an agreed place. In Primary, this could be outwith the classroom. There should be an emphasis on the need for safe and responsible use of mobile phone technology by children and young people and staff outwith formal learning and teaching purposes. Phones may be used at interval and lunch within the social areas in the secondary. In the Primary School, agreement must be made if phones are to be left in the agreed point in the classroom or returned to pupils.
- General restrictions: At all other times during the school day, mobile phones must be switched off and out of sight (e.g. in school bags). This includes movement between classes/toilets and inside toilet areas.
- Exams: Mobile phones are prohibited during exams and assessments. Digital solutions can be used for alternative assessment arrangements, but mobile phones should not be considered for this. Further information on SQA arrangements can be found here: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/107507.html>
- Privacy: There is a need to respect privacy and the camera and filming functions on mobile phones must not be used without prior consent of subjects (children and young people or staff) being filmed or photographed, including the uploading of these on social networking or other websites. Camera and filming should not be used in a classroom setting unless clearly detailed by the class teacher. This also applies within the playground before and after the school day. The use of phones is prohibited at all times in PE areas and in changing/toilet areas.

Safe and Secure Use (precautions that can be taken to ensure digital safety)

- Curriculum Support: We will incorporate lessons on safe and responsible mobile technology use into our curriculum. In addition, work is ongoing in schools in developing responsible and global citizens, recognising and respecting children's rights, creating an anti-bullying culture and raising awareness of digital and online safety through Health and Wellbeing.
- Parental Involvement: We encourage parents and carers to discuss safe mobile phone use with their children. Guidance on this will be shared regularly, including new national and local guidance.

Implementation and Enforcement

- Clear Communication: Headteachers should ensure the contents of this policy and guidance on how it will be applied in their own school are clearly communicated to all staff, pupils, parents and carers, including

through consultation and two-way engagement with Parent Councils (where available) and the wider school community. Support from Headquarters is available if needed.

- Consistent Enforcement: All staff will consistently enforce this policy, explaining the reasons behind the rules and the potential consequences of non-compliance.
- Review: This policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

Emergency Contacts

In the case of emergency, pupils should contact a member of staff who will facilitate communication with parents or carer. Parents who need to make urgent contact with their child should contact the school office. Any unwell pupils or required absences should follow the school procedures and protocols.

Exceptions

Exceptions to this policy may be made for pupils with specific needs, such as young carers or those with medical conditions. The parameters of any exceptional arrangement will be agreed on by all relevant stakeholders and managed on a case-by-case basis.

Legal Aspects

We will adhere to all relevant legislation regarding mobile phone use, including laws related to data protection and online safety.

Legislation relevant to aspects of online safety, including the safe and responsible use of mobile phones, can be found in [appendix C5](#) of the Scottish version of the online safety policy tool for schools, 360 Degree Safe Scotland. The [360 Degree Safe Scotland self-review tool](#) is free to use and is intended to help schools review their online safety policy and practice.

Regardless of specific legal aspects, staff, children and young people need to feel safe and protected. The school's policies on promoting positive relationships and behaviour and anti-bullying will provide a framework which should underpin responses to cases where mobile phones have been, or are perceived to have been, misused.

Policies should make clear that there are consequences for misusing mobile technologies. In cases of extreme misuse where criminal events have been recorded using a mobile device, this immediately becomes a police matter and the school should place the device in the hands of the police without trying to access the contents. School staff cannot access content on a pupil's mobile phone without the pupil's consent, or the consent of their parent or carer where the pupil does not have capacity to consent.

Taking photographs, videos or audio recordings of an individual without their permission may be regarded as a breach of that person's rights, and may, in some instances, be regarded as an offence by the police.

Should images or recordings be uploaded onto social networks without permission from the data subject, the individual should be asked to remove this as part of the normal behaviour policy of the school.

The Council does not accept responsibility for any damage to mobile phones whilst on school property.

Appendix One: Hints and Tips

The following are a range of hints and tips for consideration as you are creating your own local context policy. These have been collated from other schools who shared what they have done to make it work in their context. This policy sits within the wider relationships policy for your school and should link to your core values. Consistency is key.

- Each class could be given a box to store the mobile phones on arrival in the classroom.
- Mobile phones and wearables e.g. Smart Watches, should have notifications turned off.
- Staff should not handle the mobile phones – the pupil puts their mobile phone in the box and retrieves it so they remain responsible for the device. This needs to be agreed with staff and should be woven into the wider relationships policy.
- Agree with staff, pupils and parents the procedure should a pupil refuse to put the mobile phone in the box to ensure this is dealt with the same way in every class. It may be helpful to discuss the procedure within your cluster.
- Regular reminders are given to pupils through assemblies to ensure all are clear about the procedures. This is linked to the positive relationships policy and not just about mobile phones. A flowchart outlining this may be useful for schools.
- It may be useful to agree the procedure for after school clubs, events and residential with staff, pupils and parents.
- Spot checks where a pupil claims not to have a mobile phone are useful and could be followed up by a phone call to the parent.
- Challenging situations will arise with pupils refusing to comply – be aware of this and make sure that a consistent approach to dealing with this is in place and agreed with pupils, staff and parents.
- Fire evacuation procedures must be agreed in advance – the priority is to evacuate pupils, not the mobile phones. AirPods and wearables should not be used in class as pupils cannot hear the fire alarm.
- Consider when to implement the policy. Some secondary schools initially implemented with S1 – S3 during exam leave to make it easier to manage. They got pupils to create video clips around what had been agreed – for pupils and parents – and promoted these widely.
- Schools may find it helpful to provide parents with reference to useful literature that will help them understand the need for this policy:
 - TED talk – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpjSEY3pe7U>
 - Get Safe Online
 - <https://www.getsafeonline.org/personal/article-category/safeguarding-children/>
 - Health and Wellbeing resources
 - <https://sway.cloud.microsoft/8m9tr0cQVAE5mKOC?ref=Link>
 - <https://sway.cloud.microsoft/SpUNDeYyeo8YblbH?ref=Link&loc=mysways>
 - SQA
 - <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/107507.html>

Further Links

- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/mobile-phone-guidance-scotlands-schools/>
- <https://www.adesscot/Content/UserGenerated/file/RRlearningbeyondboundaries1.pdf>
- https://www.adesscot/Content/UserGenerated/file/InsightsfromYoungPeopleandTeachersinScotland_LearningBeyondBoundaries_TheStaffCollegeandADES_final301024.pdf
- <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/swiped-the-school-that-banned-smartphones>