



Ysgol Uwchradd **Whitmore** High School

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Date 08th June 2021

Dear parent/carer,

Despite all the challenges related to Covid, we have been delighted with the superb start the pupils have made in the new building. They have adapted well to our new values, which has led to a marked improvement in an already impressive learning culture in the school.

I am writing to you as we are looking to make some important changes to our mobile phone policy from September, which will put us in line with many schools and best practice. We understand that mobile phones and technology are now a key part of modern life. Most students own a mobile phone with access to the internet and, for safety reasons, students may carry a mobile phone to contact home after or before school.

However, recent research has pointed towards significant adverse effects on pupils' wellbeing and attainment due to mobile phone use in schools. For these reasons, like many other schools, our proposed new policy is for all phones and devices to be switched off and kept out of sight in the student's school bag whilst on the site. We will allow the phone in the bag as we recognise that they may be needed for the journey to and from school each day.

Like all policies, clarity and certainty is key. A study into mobile phone use found the remove of mobile phones led to students' test scores improving by over 6%. It also found that there are no significant gains in pupil performance if a ban is not widely complied with.

With this in mind, the procedure detailed below has clear expectations and consequences. We invite feedback on the proposed procedure which we will take into account in the final draft. Please contact the school by Wednesday 14th July to share your thoughts.

Kind regards,

Innes Robinson

Head of School

Whitmore High Mobile Phone Procedure (September 2021)

- Having arrived on the school premises, all phones and devices will need to be switched off and kept out of sight in the student's school bag (not in a pocket), together with any headphones.
- If phones or tablets are seen during lessons or around the school at any time, they will be confiscated and can be collected by the pupils from the student support desk at the end of the day.
- The same restrictions will apply to headphones. Headphones are not to be worn around the neck; they should be placed in bags during the school day.
- If a student refuses to hand their phone over, they will be sent to isolation for a period of one working day.
- Refusal to go to isolation will result in a one-day fixed-term exclusion with the day in isolation completed upon their re-admittance to the school.
- We understand there may be a need for pupils to communicate with parents during the school day. This can take place via the student support desk.
- Staff and site visitors will also refrain from personal phone use in all public areas of the school.
- **Mobile communication devices (phones/tablets) are not banned from school, as we recognise that they may be needed for the journey to and from school each day; however, they must remain in bags at all times on school premises.**

Rationale for new mobile phone policy

We have been delighted with the superb start the pupils have made in the new building. They have adapted well to our new values, which has led to a marked improvement in an already impressive learning culture in the school. If you were to walk around the school, you would note the calm, hardworking atmosphere that you would expect of an excellent school.

One stand-out feature however is the pupil's reliance on mobile phones. Following lockdown, we have seen an exponential growth in the use of mobile phones in school -in between lessons, at lunchtime, discreetly in lessons - all contributing to the pupils losing focus on their school work and affecting their ability to build positive relationships with their peers.

The new values-based behaviour procedure was introduced as we moved into the current building. Whilst mobile phone use was the number one issue reported by staff in terms of behaviour issues, it was decided by the staff working party that this should be dealt with separately to ensure the new behaviour policy was implemented successfully.

A separate working party was brought together to tackle the issue of mobile phones. 24 members of staff joined the group with the following findings:

- Staff felt mobile phone use was the number one issue in terms of behaviour management. 30% of *off task* behaviour points are attributed to the use of mobile phones in lessons.
- Many pupils use their phone during lunchtime and break. Whilst this helps with a calm atmosphere, it is not the ethos that we want to promote in the school. The vast majority of activity involves playing on games and watching short video clips which do not benefit the pupils both in terms of learning and wellbeing.
- In between lessons, a high proportion of pupils will walk around looking at their phone.

- The pastoral team has found a large proportion of issues between pupils start and continue online.

There was universal support for the proposed changes from the staff working group. There were, however, a few concerns involving the positive use of mobile phones in lessons, which have been recognised in the procedure.

The group agreed upon a procedure that would ensure complete consistency from all staff supported by the SLT. It was felt that there were two major obstacles to the successful implementation of the procedure.

1. **An unclear procedure in terms of when phones could be used.** Staff believed that an inconsistent approach involving phones would be less successful. This is supported by experiences of other schools contacted.
2. **One negative point per use of mobile phones would be too little a disincentive.** The prevalence of mobile phone use in lessons is so high that the teachers believe that this approach would still lead to significant disruption in terms of learning. This is again supported by the experience of other schools.

The proposed procedure detailed below was agreed by the staff working group which felt that September is the key time for introducing such a procedure. It would also be in line with Pencoedtre which will be doing the same.

In addition to the staff working group, I have met with individual focus groups of students from each year group. The main findings are below:

- Pupils would like to use their phones before and after school to feel safe going home. (this is reflected in the procedure)
- Pupils enjoy other activities at lunchtime (basketball as an example) and believe this is an important alternative to using mobile phones. How can this be achieved whilst the external space is compromised?
- The pupils understood the rationale for removing phones. (Most enjoy using their phones but understood the potential issues) In all groups, a discussion then took place involving negative experiences they have had online with their peers.
- Most of the mobile phone use in school consisted of playing games, watching videos and messaging friends.
- One group questioned the use of mobile phones for positive reasons in lessons. (This is reflected in the procedure.)

The proposal has been discussed with the new school challenge advisor, Heather Duggan, who implemented the same change in her school in 2019. The policy has been adjusted in line with her suggestions.

Following the staff working group and pupil focus groups, the following three activities will take place before the Governing Body on 6th July, seeking to achieve ratification of this procedure at that meeting.

- Governors will be provided the rationale and procedure for comment. (30th June)
- Parents will be provided with the procedure for comment. (08th July)
- Pupils will have mini assemblies to hear their views. (9th July/ 12th July)

The procedure will be ready to be implemented for September in line with Pencoedtre if Governors approve on July 6th.

Adaptations to procedure

The following adaptations to the procedure have been made in light of comments from the student focus groups, staff and governors.

1. **The positive use of mobile phones in lessons.** Whilst supportive of the procedure, a number of departments (Art, Drama and DT) use mobile phones in lessons for positive reasons - filming work, etc. A solution would be to buy tablets/use school Chromebooks for these departments. This solution was uniformly approved by the departments with the feeling that it was more equitable than asking pupils to use their own equipment, especially as some pupils do not own smartphones.
2. **Students wanting to use phones on way to school and on way home.** The procedure has been amended to reflect that students may bring their phone to school but place it in the bottom of their bag on silent. This removes the issue of parents wanting to contact their children on the way home from school.
3. **Students wanting to contact parents during the day.** They will be able to do this in two ways. They can either use the school phone in the hub or make a phone call using their own phone whilst in the hub. Parents would be able to contact school reception with a message given to pupils.
4. **Staff use of phones.** It is important that pupils feel that staff are also bound by similar rules. Previously, the proposed procedure required staff not to use phones at all in the school building. Staff put forward some important points and it was subsequently agreed that staff should not use phones in public areas in the school by staff but can use them in their classrooms and working areas. Senior staff have been giving tablets to monitor ClassCharts.
5. **Sixth Form.** Sixth Form will be given in increased level of flexibility. They will be able to use their phones in the sixth form common area. This will be in line with Pencoedtre.
6. **Exemptions.** A number of groups may have an increased need for the use of mobile phones. (Young Carers, the Autism Base etc). There will be a number of areas where mobile phones will be allowed during breaktime and lunchtime for selective pupils. The advantage of this is the pupils use of mobile will be able to be monitored with support given by members of staff.