



Harmony Hill Primary School

**DIGITAL DEVICE POLICY FOR PUPILS**

**(INCLUDING MOBILE PHONES AND SMART WATCHES)**

2024-2028

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## STATEMENT

It is the responsibility of each child's Parent/Guardian to;

- A. Decide whether it is appropriate for their son/daughter to own a mobile phone/device that can access the internet and/or contact other parties through either phone calls or text/data messaging (eg email, IM, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram or other social media platforms.)
- B. Ensure that they have taught their child how to use it safely and responsibly.
- C. Be compliant with the terms and conditions of this policy and able to demonstrate the need for an exception to the strong guidance that *“devices should not normally be brought into primary schools”*.

## HARMONY HILL MOBILE DEVICE BASELINE STANDARD

### Safeguarding of Pupils

Due to the potential serious risks to pupils and staff, this is the required standard of Harmony Hill Primary School.

### SMART Watches

#### **PUPILS ARE NOT PERMITTED TO HAVE SMART WATCHES IN SCHOOL**

Smart watches that are internet and camera enabled, have the capacity to record and store voice notes or to communicate through Bluetooth or Wi-Fi, pose significant potential concerns in terms of safeguarding. Pupils are allowed to wear analogue or simple digital watches only. Pupils are not permitted to wear their smart watch on school premises at any time on the school grounds. Pupils found in possession of a smart watch will have it confiscated and parents may be required to collect the device at the end of the school day.

#### **PUPILS ARE NOT PERMITTED TO HAVE MOBILE PHONES IN SCHOOL, UNLESS AN <sup>1</sup>APPLICATION FORM IS COMPLETED AND APPROVED BY THE SAFEGUARDING TEAM**

- If this is approved, the phone will be kept in a safe place throughout the day, with the pupil being responsible for collecting it at the end of the school day.
- The phone must not be switched on within the school grounds.
- Harmony Hill Primary School accepts no responsibility for the safety of phones/devices that are brought into school and hereby expects all pupils who have been granted permission to adhere to it.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1

## 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The widespread ownership of mobile phones and digital devices among young people requires that school management, teachers, pupils, parents and carers take steps to ensure that appropriate safeguarding measures are in place.
- 1.2. This Acceptable Use Policy is designed to ensure that potential issues involving mobile phones and digital devices can be clearly identified and addressed.
- 1.3. Pupils, their parents or carers must read and understand the Acceptable Use Policy as a condition upon which permission is given to bring mobile phones to school. As stated above, smart watches are not permitted in school.
- 1.4. The Acceptable Use Policy for mobile phones also applies to pupils during school trips and extracurricular activities.
- 1.5. The school supports the update guidance issued by DE on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2024. A copy of the Minister of Education's letter first issued to parents on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2024 is now attached to this policy (appendix 2).
- 1.6. The underpinning guidance that these devices should not normally be brought into primary school is fully supported by Harmony Hill Primary School.
- 1.7. This policy continues to give strong guidance around 'tailored approaches' which are catered for within a family's special circumstances.

## 2. RATIONALE

- 2.1. The school recognises that personal communication through digital technologies is an accepted part of everyday life but that such technologies need to be used well.
- 2.2. Harmony Hill Primary School accepts that some parents/carers give their children mobile phones or digital devices to protect them from everyday risks involving personal security and safety. There may also be concern about commuting long distances to school, co-parenting scenarios and communication at after-school care centres. It is acknowledged that providing a child with a mobile phone can give parents reassurance that they can contact their child if they need to speak to them urgently. If this is a special circumstance, permission **must** be sought within the stipulations of this policy.
- 2.3. WITHIN SCHOOL HOURS, THE ONLY WAY TO CONTACT A CHILD MUST BE THROUGH THE SCHOOL OFFICE.**

## 3. RESPONSIBILITY

- 3.1. It is the responsibility of pupils who bring mobile phones to school to abide by the stipulations outlined in this document.
- 3.2. The decision to provide a mobile phone to their children should be made by parents or carers. It is incumbent upon parents to understand the capabilities of the phone and the potential use/misuse of those capabilities.
- 3.3. Parents/carers should be aware that if their child takes a mobile phone to school, it is assumed household insurance will provide the required cover in

the event of loss or damage. **The school will not accept responsibility for any loss, damage or costs incurred.**

- 3.4. Parents/carers are reminded that in cases of emergency, the school office remains the only appropriate point of contact.
- 3.5. As noted above, parents must be compliant with the conditions of application as outlined in the baseline statement above.

#### **4. ACCEPTABLE USES**

- 4.1. For pupils who have gained permission to have a mobile phone within school but retained by staff during the school day, **the mobile phone should be switched off when entering the school grounds**
- 4.2. Pupils should protect their phone numbers by only giving them to close friends and keeping a note of who they have given them to.

#### **5. UNACCEPTABLE USES**

- 5.1. Using mobile phones to bully and threaten other pupils is unacceptable. Cyber bullying will not be tolerated. In some cases, it can constitute criminal behaviour. If the use of technology humiliates, embarrasses or causes offence it is unacceptable regardless of whether 'consent' was given. (Refer to the school Safer Internet Policy)
- 5.2. It is forbidden for pupils to "gang up" on another pupil and use their mobile phones to take videos and pictures of acts to denigrate and humiliate that pupil and then send the pictures to other pupils or upload it to a website for public viewing. This also includes using mobile phones to photograph or film any pupil or member of staff without their consent. It is a criminal offence to use a mobile phone to menace, harass or offend another person and almost all calls, text messages and emails can be traced.
- 5.3. Mobile phones are not to be used or taken into changing rooms or toilets or used in any situation that may cause embarrassment or discomfort to their fellow pupils, staff or visitors to the school. Compliance to Harmony Hill baseline standard for mobile phones will ensure this does not happen during school hours.
- 5.4. Failure to comply to the baseline standard indicated within this policy will result in the pupils facing disciplinary sanctions, in conjunction with the school's Safer Internet Policy, Positive Behaviour Policy and Anti-bullying Policy.

#### **6. THEFT OR DAMAGE**

- 6.1. Pupils who have gained approval to have their phones retained by staff during school hours, should mark these clearly with their names.
- 6.2. **The school accepts no responsibility for replacing lost, stolen or damaged mobile phones.**

- 6.3. The school accepts no responsibility for pupils who lose or have their mobile phones stolen while travelling to and from school.**
- 6.4. It is strongly advised that pupils use passwords/pin numbers to ensure that unauthorised phone calls cannot be made on their phones (e.g. by other pupils, or if stolen). Pupils must keep their password/pin numbers confidential. Mobile phones and/or passwords/pins may not be shared.
- 6.5. Lost and stolen mobile phones in the UK can be blocked across all networks making them virtually worthless because they cannot be used.

## **7. INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT**

- 7.1. Any pupil who uses vulgar, derogatory, or obscene language while using a mobile phone will face disciplinary action.
- 1.1. Pupils with mobile phones may not engage in personal attacks, harass another person, or post private information about another person using SMS messages, taking/sending photos or objectionable images, and phone calls. Pupils using mobile phones to bully other pupils will face disciplinary action. (It should be noted that it is a criminal offence to use a mobile phone to menace, harass or offend another person. As such, the school may consider it appropriate to involve the police.)
- 1.2. Pupils must ensure that files stored on their phones do not contain violent, degrading, racist or pornographic images. The transmission of such images is a criminal offence.
- 1.3. Similarly, 'sexting' – which is the sending of personal sexual imagery - is also a criminal offence.

## **8. SANCTIONS**

- 8.1. If the guidelines of this policy are breached, sanctions may be used in consultation and conjunction with the Safer Internet, Anti-Bullying and Positive Behaviour Policies.
- 8.2. Where pupils bring phones to school without the required approval, the phone will be confiscated, and parents/carers may be asked to collect it at the end of the school day.
- 8.3. If the guidelines of this policy are breached by a pupil who has been granted permission to retain their phone, this privilege will be removed.

## 9. APPENDICES

### 9.1 Application for Mobile Phone to Be Retained by Class Teacher During School Hours

Name of Pupil: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

**I have read and understood the 'Digital Device Policy for Pupils'.**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons for Request: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Approved / Declined

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Safeguarding Team)

NB: If this request is approved, it is the child's responsibility to collect the phone at the end of the school day.

Approved phones must not be switched on in the school grounds.

## 9.2 Letter from the Education Minister – 3.9.24

**FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER**

Parents, Carers and Guardians



Department of  
**Education**  
[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

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43 Balloo Road  
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BANGOR  
BT19 7PR

[private.office@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@education-ni.gov.uk)

3 September 2024

Dear Parents, Carers and Guardians,

**SUBJECT: GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS ON PUPIL USE OF PERSONAL MOBILE PHONES AND OTHER SIMILAR DEVICES DURING THE SCHOOL DAY AND POTENTIAL PILOT PROGRAMME OF INHIBITING DEVICES**

Today, my department published new guidance for schools which recommends that pupils do not use their personal mobile phones or other similar devices, during the school day and that these devices should not in normal circumstances be brought into primary schools. I wanted to write to you directly to explain why my department is taking this approach.

There are growing concerns about the impact of smartphones on children and young people's development. This includes being exposed to violence and sexual content, the risk of online bullying, the potential to effect sleep and the impact on their social skills. I know many of you are worried about the time young people spend on their phones and some of the content they may be viewing. It is a particular concern that they may be missing out on real life experiences with their family and friends.

I have considered a number of recent reports. These include the following:

- The National Behaviour Survey (2021-2022) found that 29% of secondary school 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.
- 45% of students across OECD countries feel anxious if their phones are not near them.
- A report from the Children's commissioner published in 2023 indicates that nearly a third of young people will have viewed pornography by age 11.
- The [Growing Up Online](#) study by the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement at Stranmillis University College 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.

In school itself, there is growing evidence that phones can distract children from learning and that limiting access to mobile phones during the school day can have a positive impact on academic engagement and achievement. Schools that have introduced such policies have found a range of positive outcomes, including reduced bullying, an overall reduction in social media usage, increased healthy play, reduced distraction and improved academic attainment.

Many countries across the world are increasingly taking steps to limit phone use at school, including both England and the Republic of Ireland, as well as many European countries. These changes can make the world of difference in our classrooms. I want our children to be able to concentrate in school and to enjoy break and lunch playing, having fun and socialising with their friends.

I am also aware that our children and young people live in a digital world and need to learn to use technology safely and responsibly. Our schools have a key role in supporting our children to become digital citizens and digital workers of the future and in enabling them to have the knowledge and skills to access technology and to use it safely, keeping themselves, their personal information and their money safe. This is extremely important, and I want to reassure you that it is an essential part of the school curriculum.

We know that technology - when used well - can have a valuable role in supporting learning. It has a range of potential benefits - particularly for older children - including

digital textbooks and class notes, submission of homework, allowing feedback on pupils' work and allowing access to pre-recorded online lessons. Many schools have invested in technology such as tablets, iPads or laptops to support learning and teaching. Such devices will often have restrictions on internet or other applications.

Today's guidance recognises the essential role of technology in society but aims to support our children to get the most from their school day. It is our job as adults to keep our children safe; guide them in using technology appropriately and to support them to become happy and well-rounded individuals.

As a parent, I understand that many of you, particularly those with post-primary children, will wish them to have access to mobiles for safety reasons travelling to and from school. I want to reassure you that the guidance sets out a range of approaches to limiting phone use during the school day and highlights that travel is an important consideration. In addition, schools are also asked to ensure tailored approaches dependent on the particular needs of individual pupils, for example those with medical conditions or Special Educational Needs.

In order for you to support your child(ren) and help them to understand the risks of excessive use of mobile phones and the benefits of having a break from devices during the school day, you may wish to familiarise yourself with some of the evidence and concerns noted above. You may also wish to utilise resources provided in the Safer schools App [Home - Safer Schools NI](#), funded by my Department, and/or the Safeguarding Board's Online Safety Hub [SBNI Online Safety Hub](#) that I wrote to schools in April about and asked to be shared with parents and children.

These are important issues for us to consider as a society. By working together as government, schools and parents we can ensure our children have the very best opportunities to fulfil their potential.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Givan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a flourish at the end.

**Paul Givan MLA**  
**Minister of Education**