



St Louise's
Comprehensive College, Belfast
A Specialist College

Mobile Phone Policy



ST LOUISE'S MISSION STATEMENT

*"In partnership with parents, guardians, staff, governors and pupils
St Louise's promotes excellence in learning and teaching
within a Catholic, Vincentian, Comprehensive ethos"*

Overview of Mobile Phone Policy

The aims of the Mobile Phone Policy in St Louise's is:

1. To clarify the school position on mobile phones.
2. To ensure that staff, students and parents are fully conversant with the policy and understand the reasons for the policy.
3. To support other related school policies which aim for outstanding behaviour and the well-being of all students and staff across the school; including the:
 - ❖ Anti-Bullying Policy,
 - ❖ Cyber-Bullying Policy,
 - ❖ Child Protection Policy,
 - ❖ Pastoral Care Policy,
 - ❖ Positive Behaviour Policy,
 - ❖ Learning and Teaching Policy,
 - ❖ Examination Policy,
 - ❖ Acceptable Use of ICT Policy.
4. To safeguard against the misuse of smartphone technology and in particular the ease of access to a range of social media publishing platforms, which impact student and staff welfare and safeguarding. It is designed to help us work together in the shared responsibility for all stakeholders in our school community in eliminating the potential dangers that smartphones pose while promoting the undoubted positive benefits that they can provide.

Rationale

Mobile phones with smartphone technology are now part of modern society and the majority of students will now own one. We understand that for safety reasons students will carry a mobile phone in order to contact parents/carers after school/before school; however, mobile phones particularly smart phones have led to wide and growing range of problems in schools with student's adversely affected with impacts such as:

- The integration of high quality cameras into smartphones leading to safeguarding and child protection/exploitation risks as young people and all members of the school community are left exposed and vulnerable.
- Constant notifications can reduce concentration levels considerably in class leading to disruption, poor learning, engagement and outcomes.
- Concerns regarding disruption and misuse of smart phones during examinations – children communicating examination answers to each other thereby compromising examinations security and integrity particularly under exam conditions which could lead to loss of qualifications.
- Access to harmful media images including graphic violence which can be traumatic to view and makes light of criminal behaviour.
- Cyber-bullying which can take place in many forms particularly after school and with more anonymous platforms; there are even more opportunities to engage in this behaviour.

- Students messaging each other as a method of intimidation/bullying/exclusion.
- Pre-arranged fights which are videoed and posted online.
- There are a range of psychological, social and health issues associated with smartphone technology including lack of sleep from late night notifications, cyber bullying and sexting.
- Reputational and emotional damage to the individual both student, staff and the school to which they belong when images and video are taken and posted online.
- Negative impact on careers as more employers are searching through social media to gain deeper insight into potential employees.
- The potential for loss, theft or damage of expensive smartphones would require extensive and time consuming investigation which takes away from a school's core educational purpose.
- Students contacting parents to complain of feeling ill/upset and arranging to be collected from school without actually informing the school and allowing the school to manage the situation which has significant child protection risks.
- Students abusing the photographic/video/audio facility available on some phones, taking recordings of other children and staff in potentially embarrassing situations without their permission

Our Belief

We in St Louise's concur with the growing body of scientific and experiential evidence and believe that the impacts of these issues which is not an exhaustive list can lead to poor mental and emotional wellbeing, low self-esteem and less advanced communication skills. The use of mobile phones by students can also create the climate for conflict. This adversely affects the development of normal relationships and impacts the expected development of social skills which support the acquisition and development of resilience and conflict resolution skills. As a school, we expect our students to talk to each other and develop friendship groups at break and lunchtime to develop their social skills.

Society is witnessing a change in culture. Whereby a range of shocking crimes, assaults and behaviours are trivialized and are at risk of being 'normalised' with widespread sharing between social media platforms. Modern editing and publishing equipment also places members of school communities; students and their families as well as staff at risk of cyber-bullying, harassment and hoaxes.

Policy Statement

As a result, the unauthorised* use of mobile/smartphones on the school premises is completely forbidden and students found using their mobile phone during school hours will be dealt with in accordance with the sanctions outlined in this policy.

**For the purposes of this policy, authorised use may be permitted in a controlled environment only after a member of staff has made a formal request through their Head of Department and a member of the Year Team to use limited features of smartphones on the genuine basis of enhancing the educational experience. If agreed, a notice must be placed on the entrance to the room that mobile phones are in use. Please note that under no circumstances must communication features or any image/audio capturing/recording feature be used. The smartphone must always be put into flight mode when under controlled use. An example would include an Art Student using a smartphone to observe fine detail of pre-captured photographs or those uploaded to a controlled departmental repository to draw from after the teacher has followed the correct protocol and is monitoring throughout.*

In order to allow students to contact parents, after normal school hours, students will be allowed to arrange transport with parents under the guidance of the member of staff responsible and in an agreed zone at the front of the building.

Unauthorised Use	Stage 1: Sanction Scale
<p>Stage 1 – Student possession of phone (Distraction)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walking with the phone in hand. - Visible through pockets/ear phones attached. - Notifications evident through lighting/sounds. - Repeated Stage 1 type infractions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Request to switch off and place in bag immediately. Record name and inform Form Tutor and Year Team. ➤ Confiscate phone and place in reception for student collection after school. ➤ Confiscate phone & place in reception for parent collection after school.
<p>Stage 2 – Student using phone for Communication. (Disruption)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Texting or appearing to type. - Any notification or audio sounds that cause disruption. - Making or receiving calls under any circumstance, including making and receiving calls from parents/guardians. - Video calls made/received - Use of messaging apps/chat groups. - Use of any social media application to make or post material that may be recognised within our anti-bullying policy as malicious. - Repeated Stage 2 type infractions. - Possession of mobile phone during any examination. 	<p>Stage 2: Sanction Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Confiscate phone and place in reception for parent collection between 3.30pm and 4.30pm. ➤ Confiscate phone and place in reception for parent collection after meeting with the year team where has been agreed and an agreement will be explained and signed. ➤ Confiscate phone and place in reception for parent collection and further referral to other policies by the Year Team including Anti-bullying Policy and others listed which may result in further sanction and support including Pastoral Support Centre and suspension. ➤ Referral to awarding body in accordance with JCQ Guidelines who will apply additional sanctions*.
<p>Stage 3 – Student using phone for producing, sharing, distributing and receiving images and media. (Safeguarding)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking photographs including videos/selfies. - Uploading images of self and/or others to any social media application - Live recording/posting/sharing of self/others during school day (with/without permission). - Live recording/posting/sharing of lessons/daily school life school. - Live recording/posting/sharing of any image in high risk areas (toilets/changing rooms) - Live recording and distribution of images of staff. - Production and distribution of videos showing fights/violence/criminal behaviour. - Production and distribution of indecent image and videos. ❖ Refusal to hand phone over after justified and reasonable request at any stage. 	<p>Stage 3: Sanction Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Confiscate phone and place in reception for parent collection after meeting with the year team has been agreed and where an agreement will be explained and signed. ➤ Confiscate phone and place in reception for parent collection and further referral to other policies by the Year Team including Child Protection Policy and others listed which may result in further sanction and support including Pastoral Support Centre and external agency involvement, suspension and or expulsion. ❖ Referral to <u>additional</u> sanctions within the Positive Behaviour Policy.

Preventative Education

- Acceptable use of phones will be modelled through pastoral lessons, external agency involvement, assembly and exemplified by all staff in all public spaces. There is also the potential for misuse during authorised, controlled use. Staff will follow all protocols and will coach and monitor students throughout the authorised use. We will also keep parents informed of the expectations we share and equip them with updates in the educational literature regarding mobile phone use to ensure that each member of our school community is respected, safe and supported when in school and at home.

Authorised Use Protocol

- *Notice* must be made by a member of staff for an authorized use for a specified period of time (usually one double period) to both the Head of Department and the Head of Year at least 24 hours in advance.
- The notice must specify the nature of the usage and how it will enhance learning.
- The Head of Department must file the notice and the Member of the Year Team will be aware and will respond to the notice.
- The member of staff must take all reasonable steps to ensure that images/recordings are not made of self or others or any communication is being made.
- This is usually by ensuring that airplane or flight mode has been switched on.
- The member of staff must monitor the use throughout and any unauthorized use is dealt with in line with the sanctions for unauthorized use.
- The member of staff must make it clear that the room is being used with authorized use of mobile phone technology. This can be achieved by placing a recognisable sign over the door.

Responsibility for the security of Mobile Phones

We are very aware that mobile phones with smartphone technology and the widespread use of social media are now part of modern society, our experiences are that there is a small number of students misusing their phone and applications while they are in school. Confiscating and storing phones until they can be placed at reception takes time and has the potential for reducing contact time. *Staff may safely store these phones locally until a time that they can have them signed into reception without disturbing learning or leaving classes unattended.* We would prefer that mobile phones were left at home; some of our students do this and if they need to contact home they can do so through their Year Team. This would be very beneficial for the student. Moreover, some of our students who have been without their phone for an extended period of time have expressed relief to us. We are also aware of the growing problem of digital addiction, but the studies are only starting to yield information on the effects for our young people especially in the area of brain development – therefore we highly recommend that students do not have phones in school if not necessary. We also understand the imposition of having to come to school to have a phone returned and have tried to address that in this policy by ensuring that what we do is reasonable and proportionate and in the best interests of our students and staff. However, we must seek to protect our students and staff at all times and feel that if we work together we can attempt to eliminate the serious dangers mobile phones and social media poses to our students; your children.

Clarification of our Rights and Responsibilities as Staff

If a teacher confiscates a mobile phone (or something else of value) from a pupil and it then gets broken or lost, who is responsible, and who must therefore bear the cost of replacing the item? Is it the teacher, the pupil or the school? And what does the law say about how long it is reasonable to withhold such items from pupils?

Legally, the school has taken possession of the pupil's property. However, Section 94 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 states that where a teacher disciplines a pupil by confiscating an item, neither the teacher nor the school will be liable for any loss or damage

to that item. Equally, there is no statutory liability on schools for items that go missing in other ways.

This will no doubt come as a relief to schools. However, there are some caveats to all this.

First, the disciplinary penalty must be lawful. This means the action must be reasonable, proportionate and imposed by an authorised person (normally a paid member of the teaching staff) and not in breach of any statutory requirement or prohibition. The act does give some helpful guidance on considerations to be taken when deciding if such a penalty is reasonable: these include deciding whether the punishment is proportionate in all the circumstances, and whether there are any personal characteristics relevant to the pupil, including their age, special educational needs, disability or any religious requirements (e.g. dress) affecting the imposition of the penalty.

Second, the school's policy on items such as mobile phones and other electronics should be communicated clearly to the pupil and their parents or guardians. They should be told that bringing such items into school is done so at their own risk. The policy should also outline what is considered acceptable phone use and that the school retains the right to confiscate items for inappropriate use.

The school owes a duty to each child in its care.

Third, when school staff confiscate such items they should also take reasonable steps to ensure their safety, such as storing them in lockers in the staff room.

However, even if the school adheres to all the above, additional complications can arise. Picture the following scenario: the parents of the pupil whose phone has been removed lodge a complaint with the head the following day. Their child was unable to call home, telling their parents they had been held back for detention, or decided to stay on for a revision session that night; this caused untold worry for the parents, who were left in the dark and unable to get hold of their child.

In short, the school owes a duty to each child in its care, requiring it to do what is reasonable to protect the health, safety and welfare of

children and dependent on the facts of each individual case. Following the guidance from the act, confiscating a pupil's phone overnight for a student who is older, lives locally and is not otherwise vulnerable is likely to be seen as more reasonable than a younger child, or one with special needs, whose phone may be an important safety item.

In summary, the law does protect the teacher and school, provided the guidelines are followed.