Report to:	Education, Children's and Leisure Services Committee	Meeting Date:	13 May 2025
Report by:	Depute Chief Executive (Education, Organisational Development and Communities)	Report No:	EDU027/25/VC/AMB
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Subject:	Mobile Phone Usage in Schools		

1. PURPOSE

☒ **For Decision**   ☐ **For Information**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Committee of the Mobile Phone Usage in Schools guidance produced for Moray schools based on Scottish Government Guidance as well as to report the results of the consultation on the use of phones in schools and seek Committee approval for this to be introduced from August 2025.

1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (D) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to all the functions of the Council as an Education Authority.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 Scottish Government produced advice and guidance to local authorities on Mobile phones: Guidance for Scotland's schools on 15 August 2024.

2.2 The service created a short life working group to develop Guidance for Moray Schools based on the national guidance and as a result surveyed all parents/carers, staff and pupils regarding an option to be adopted in all schools from August 2025.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that Committee:

i) **Approves the Moray Guidance on mobile phone usage in schools in Appendix 1; and**

ii) **Notes the results of the consultation survey and agrees to implement the option in paragraph 4.11 from August 2025.**

iii) **Instruct Head Teachers to develop local policies, aligned to their positive relationship policies for use from August 2025**

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4.   BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

4.1   The Scottish Government's Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) provided the detailed evidence on the many issues faced in schools across Scotland in the aftermath of the pandemic, where relationships and behaviour have changed.

4.2   It is acknowledged that mobile phones have become intrinsic to the way society communicates and particularly for young people. Notwithstanding, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that over-exposure to mobile phone use can result in limited concentration, unhappiness and isolation. Further, the recently published Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 data, published in December 2023, showed that almost a third of 15 year olds in Scotland and across all Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries reported being distracted using digital devices in most or every maths class – and around a quarter reported being distracted by others using digital devices.

4.3   Scottish Government have the desire to equip the next generation with the necessary skills and resilience associated with the modern age. With the release of national Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's schools, there was a desire to empower Head Teachers to take the steps they see fit to limit the use of mobile phones in our schools, up to and including a full ban on the school estate during the school day.

4.4   The service undertook initial conversations with Head Teachers and Parent Council chairs and it was agreed to have a short life working group comprising of Head Teachers, teaching and promoted staff, parent council representatives, trade union representatives, officers and the Chair and Depute Chair of Committee to develop local guidance.

4.5   Prior to the group meeting, officers drafted guidance based on the national guidance with options for Head Teachers to consider which included that phones should be:
- Switched off and out of sight during lesson times/placed in storage facilities, unless their use is required in support of learning and teaching or for medical reasons (e.g. diabetes monitoring)
- Switched off and out of sight throughout the school day to include morning break and lunchtime when on school grounds
- Switched off and out of sight/placed in storage facilities within each classroom, handed in at the start of each lesson and collected at the end. Pupils may use their mobile phones during break and lunchtimes
- In agreement with the school, parents/carers support a 'no mobile phone to school' policy where no mobile phones are permitted within school building

- Are permitted in classrooms, switched on but on silent mode and only accessed when necessary to support learning and teaching, or for medical reasons (e.g. diabetes monitoring)

4.6   The working group had a very productive meeting where there was a desire to have a Moray position due to the proximity of schools to each other, the number of placing requests from one school to another and also that within secondary, and in particular the senior phase, that some young people attend their main school as well as a neighbouring secondary in order to study particular subjects. Different options in place at different schools would be confusing for both staff and pupils.

4.7   It is important that any guidance for the use of mobile phones in schools aligns with positive relationships and behaviour policies. The guidance (**Appendix 1)** highlights context, risks of using mobile devices, purpose and aims, guiding principle and digital citizenship as well as legal aspects and local and national policy and guidance. It also provides a possible layout for school based policies to support senior school leaders.

4.8   The working group agreed an option which was consulted on for the last two weeks of term providing the opportunity for all parents/carers, pupils from P5-S6 and all staff to respond to. The Council Communications team promoted this across social media platforms as well as this being shared by Head Teachers using their normal communication methods.

4.9   A large number of responses (3283) were received as follows:
Parents/carers   2012
Staff   489
Pupils   782

4.10   There was opportunity to provide comments and many were received with the majority supporting the option and others highlighting potential issues. An executive summary of the survey results is provided in **Appendix 2**.

4.11   The consultation sought views on the following:
Primary
In Primary Schools, there should be **no** mobile phones or devices present in school unless to support a medical need.

Secondary
In Secondary Schools, mobile phones or devices should be **<u>switched off and out of sight, inside the school building over the course of the school day</u>**. The only exception to this would be in the event of supporting a medical need.

4.12   The results were:
Yes 73%
No 27%

5.   PROPOSALS

5.1   It is proposed that Committee agrees with the results of the survey and that the options in para 4.11 should be adopted in Moray Schools from August 2025.

5.2 All schools should have their own policy, linked to their positive relationship and behaviour policies with clear processes in place for those who do not adhere to the policy.   This should also take into consideration and account for all exceptions as listed in the National Guidance and now accounted for within the local guidance where the survey only highlighted medical exception or other accepted exceptions. To be considered as an agreed exception, the child or young person should be in child's planning with clear reasons and protocols for the requirement for a phone as a reasonable adjustment. There should also be clear guidelines regarding contact with school by parents/carers as well as a process for a pupil to contact their parent/carer during the school day.

6.   SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcome Improvement Plan)	x	
Policy and Legal	x	
Financial		x
Risk	x	
Staffing		x
Best Value and Transformation		x
Property		x
Information Communications Technology/Digital		x
Equalities. Social Inclusion and Economic Impact	x	
Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainability		x

6.2 **Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**
Improved Collaborative Leadership, as part of continuous improvement through Best Value, will better enable the Council to fulfil the ambitions set out in its strategic plans.
a) Links to Council Corporate Plan – The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
⊠ Tackle Poverty and Inequality.
☐ Build Stronger Greener Vibrant Economy.
⊠ Build Thriving, resilient, empowered Communities.

b) Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan – The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
☐ Developing a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable economy
⊠ Building a better future for our children and young people in   Moray.
☐ Empowering and connecting communities.
⊠ Improving wellbeing of our population

6.3 **Policy and Legal**
The legal aspects are contained within the policy.

6.4 **Financial**
There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

One off Costs:

Service Area	Budget	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Year	Virement From	Other Comments

Annually Recurring Costs:

Service Area	Budget	With Effect From	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if applicable)	Other Comments

6.5 **Risk**
There are risks in terms of any potential impact on learning and teaching where there are insufficient devices for young people within schools. In addition there are risks in terms of connectivity where personal devices will not be able to be used putting further pressure on the network.

6.6 **Staffing**
None

6.7 **Best Value and Transformation**
None

6.8 **Property**
None

6.9 **Information Communications/Technology/Digital**
None arising directly from this report

6.10 **Equalities, Social Inclusion and Economic Impact**
The national guidance aims to reduce harassment or discrimination through the removal of mobile phones and includes five exceptions to mitigate against any negative impacts. The Scottish Government carried out a national assessment on the impact of the Mobile Phone Guidance for Scotland's Schools. Their Equality Impact Assessment – Record can be viewed online and is based on the five exceptions set out in S.19 of that guidance being applied.

Where the national guidance has been implemented already across Scotland, schools see a positive impact on behaviour and relationships and in terms of social interaction between pupils and pupils and staff.

6.11 **Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts**
None

7.   **CONSULTATION**

7.1   This report has been prepared in consultation with the Quality Improvement Manager, Early Years' Service Manager, Quality Improvement Officers, Equal Opportunities Officer and the Education Consultative Group and any comments made have been incorporated into the report

8.   **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1   [Guidance on Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools](#)

Moray Education

Use of Mobile Technology in Schools Guidance

...a better future for all Moray's children
Values: Growth, Respectful, Experiences, Achieving, Teamwork

The following guidance has been developed based on the "Mobile phones: guidance for Scotland's Schools" Scottish Government guidance. This guidance provides schools and local authorities with advice on the development and updating of local policy in relation to use of mobile phones in schools.

Context

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

Used responsibly, mobile devices such as mobile phones can enhance learning and teaching, communication and social experiences and can bring a sense of security to parents and carers as their children enjoy more independent activities such as walking or travelling to and from school unsupervised.

Risks of using personal mobile devices

There are risks associated with children and young people bringing their own personal mobile phones in to school. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) 2023 highlighted cases of misuse both in terms of low level disruption in classes and more serious misuse such as bullying and harassment of children and young people, and staff. Such behaviour is unacceptable in any context. The inappropriate use of this technology can also detract from their appropriate use in learning and can involve teaching staff, children and young people, and parents/carers in investigations which require disproportionate amounts of time and can cause significant disruption to the school and wider community.

Stories relating to misuse of mobile phones are frequently reported in the media with many demonstrating the potentially devastating impact of such misuse on individuals and their families.

The two key policy drivers, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child, recognise that developing the wellbeing of staff and children and young people is essential for creating the right environment for effective learning and teaching through curriculum delivery.

In addition, Moray Council have made 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).

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to provide schools in Moray with advice on how to develop a local school policy that encourages safe and responsible use of personal mobile technology in school, and beyond. These policies should also be designed to protect staff and children and young people from harassment and abuse which can arise from the misuse of such technology.

Historically, 'acceptable use' policies have had a focus on managing and controlling online behaviour. More recently, there has been a move towards the promotion of positive relationships and behaviour in both school and digital contexts. This shift recognises the important role of education and beyond in preparing young people to become 'digital citizens'. It takes into account the fact that young people have extensive access to the internet through mobile devices outside the school community and at home.

Moray Guidance Aims

- To provide a set of guiding principles for schools to consider when providing their own policies on safe and responsible use, rooted in the principles of 'citizenship' as part of Curriculum for Excellence, anti-bullying policies and the approaches to promoting positive relationships and behaviour outlined in Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1 and Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2. This also includes The Moray Standards for Supporting All Learners and Learning and Teaching
- To emphasise that these principles can be mapped to existing Health and Wellbeing outcomes, particularly those referring to social, emotional and mental wellbeing as well as relationships
- To emphasise schools' responsibility for the health and wellbeing and safety of their staff, children and young people
- To provide advice on how to develop local policies in partnership with the whole school community, engendering a sense of engagement, ownership and commitment
- To provide advice on relevant legal aspects

Moray Guiding Principles

For children and young people, the internet is a place, not a thing. It is a social space where they regularly go and socialise. Similar to any place where children and young people may go, there are benefits and risks. We would expect children and young people to behave appropriately with guidance from adults, as with any other context.

Parents/carers have a critical role in supporting their child(ren) and ensuring that school policies are adhered to. In addition, parents/carers can choose which device their child(ren) have access to as well as whether they take them to school and what parental restrictions are placed on such devices (for example, restriction on apps, parental monitoring/controls etc). Parents/carers may find it helpful to look at advice through the Safer School App (schools will support with further information in relation to this App).

Children and young people need to develop their understanding that certain behaviours may be unacceptable and this includes in an online environment as well as school grounds, within the school building or anywhere else. Expectations for responsible behaviour and positive relationships should remain consistent regardless of the context, where any breach of expectations in relation to mobile technology should be handled in the same way as other unacceptable behaviours in line with the school's behaviour/positive relationships policy. Staff are expected to respond consistently to any irresponsible use of mobile technology and will explain to children and young people why certain behaviours are unacceptable, and what the potential impact of such behaviours might be.

Our expectation in Moray is that policies on the use of mobile phone technology must be incorporated into existing positive relationships/behaviour policies, which will already set out how incidents will be dealt with.

In order to promote good citizenship including digital, schools should consider how they will deliver learning and teaching about online behaviour and relationships. This could be incorporated into the Health and Wellbeing curriculum e.g. Personal and Social Education, School Assembly programmes, Digital Schools.

Digital Citizenship

The key principles of digital citizenship that may have an impact on use of mobile phones include:

- *Safeguarding and Child Protection*
  - o Any restriction on access to mobile phones at school supports protection of children and young people from access to information and materials which may be detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing
  - o Children and young people should be empowered and confident to access the digital world creatively and fearlessly (UNCRC Article 17(e), protected from online harm
- *Digital etiquette (standards of conduct when using any mobile devices)*
  - o Guidance on restrictions or limitations within school and school grounds for staff, pupils and visitors should be clearly communicated
  - o Mobile phones must be prohibited during examinations including preliminary examinations and class assessments
  - o If personal mobile devices are used to capture, film or photograph learning, clear guidance must be provided to ensure the safety of pupils or staff (data subjects)
  - o Personal devices should not be used for school events where school owned devices will capture, film or photograph taking cognisance of GDPR and data permissions (annual return)
  - o Images or recording obtained by use of mobile technology should not be uploaded on social networking or other websites without permission of the subjects (schools may use closed or private platforms in order to share events with parents/carers)
- *Digital rights and responsibilities (what people can do if they feel uncomfortable with digital communication and how they can report misuse)*
  - o Guidance on consequences for the misuse of mobile phones including the removal and return of phones if necessary
  - o Guidance on reporting the misuse of mobile phones within schools to include support for staff and pupils who are subject to harassment using mobile phones
  - o Clear expectations for all regarding consistency in dealing with any misuse of mobile phones
- *Digital security (precautions that can be taken to ensure digital safety)*
  - o Clarity on the curricular content to support pupil's awareness of safe and secure use of mobile technology, as a responsible citizen cognisant of positive relationships and anti-bullying culture

School Policy Development and Implementation

Primary

In Primary Schools, there should be **no** mobile phones or devices present in school unless to support a medical need or other exceptions below.

Secondary

In Secondary Schools, mobile phones or devices should be **switched off and out of sight, inside the school building over the course of the school day**. The only exception to this would be in the event of supporting a medical need or other exceptions below.

If mobile phones are switched off, messages/calls should not be received through Smart Watches.

Key themes that may form a framework for whole school discussion and ultimate inclusion in such a policy include:

- Guidance regarding any restrictions on personal mobile phone device use within school grounds, within the school day, at social events and on school outings

- Clear guidelines on the appropriate use of mobile devices for teaching purposes to include capturing filming or photographing learning. Due to the need to respect privacy, mobile phones must not be used without prior consent of subjects (children and young people, or staff)

- Clear guidance on situations where mobile phones may be used by children and young people with particular needs (e.g. young carer)

- The range of ways the policy will be shared with children and young people, parents and staff. For example, School Handbook, School Website, or any other means of communication

- Clear procedures for confiscation and return of mobile phone devices

- Clear protocols on reporting misuse within the school and support available to all where they are subject to harassment

- Clearly stated responsibility/liability for personal mobile phones in terms of loss, theft or breakage (in Moray, responsibility lies with the individual for any loss, theft or breakage)

- Agreed consequences and sanctions for the misuse of mobile technology are integrated into each school's existing policies and approaches to manging relationships and behaviours

- Consideration is given to whether exceptions for individual circumstances are required. For example, exceptions for pupils:
    o   who are young carers and who require ongoing contact with family members;
    o   who have medical conditions that require monitoring using mobile technology;
    o   who experience concern or anxiety, including whilst away from home on school trips;
    o   with additional support needs where access to their mobile phone is used as part of a planned approach to managing their learning needs;

- with disabilities who use their mobile phone as part of a reasonable adjustment, including access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) etc.

To be considered as an agreed exception, the child or young person should be in child's planning with clear reasons and protocols for the requirement for a phone as a reasonable adjustment.

Legal Aspects

A full list of legislation relevant to all aspects of online safety, including the safe and responsible use of mobile technology, can be found here https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/wellbeing-in-schools/ This has been lifted from the accompanying guidance for the Scottish version of the e-safety self-review tool for schools, 360 Degree Safe, and will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

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 technologies 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.

Taking photographs or film/audio recordings of anyone without their permission may be regarded as a breach of a person's rights, which may be regarded in some instances by the police as a breach of the peace.

Should anyone choose to record images and then upload them onto social networks without permission from the person being recorded, the individual should be asked to remove this as part of the normal behaviour policy of the school. Schools may also approach social networks to request removal of inappropriate materials but the decision to do this lies with the social network provider.

Local Policies

- Our Moray Standard for Learning and Teaching
- Our Moray Standard for Supporting All Learners
- Computer Use Policy/Social Network Sites – Moray Council

National Policies/Guidance

- National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 (updated 2023): https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland-2021-updated-2023/
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/
- Health and Wellbeing in Curriculum for Excellence: https://education.gov.scot/media/5p4dvqvm/health-and-wellbeing-eo.pdf
- Getting it Right for Every Child:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright
- Better relationships, better learning, better behaviour: The Scottish Advisory Group on Behaviour in Schools (SAGBIS) response to Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2013: https://education.gov.scot/media/42mjymdr/betterrelationships.pdf
- Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Managing School Exclusions: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/17095258/0
- Connect (Supporting Partnerships in Education) summary/advice for parents/parent groups:
  https://connect.scot/
  https://connect.scot/news/summary-mobile-phone-guidance-schools
- NSPCC age ratings/restrictions for apps and keeping children safe online:
  https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/
  https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/app-age-rating/

Executive Summary from Consultation Survey

The document presents feedback from various stakeholder groups— Parents/carers, Staff, and Pupils—regarding a proposed policy stance. The data reveals that 1659 Parents/carers agree while 353 disagree, 334 Pupils agree and 448 disagree, and 402 Staff agree with 87 disagreeing. Key themes from the comments include strong support for the policy due to issues like mobile phone distractions, concerns about enforcement practicality, and the need for exceptions for medical reasons. Respondents express some mixed opinions on whether a complete ban is necessary, suggesting phones should be allowed during breaks and for safety, walking to/from school. Overall, the feedback highlights the importance of clear enforcement guidelines, alternative technology provision, and safety considerations for pupils.

Insight into the Data:

1. **Stakeholder Groups**: The data includes various stakeholder groups such as Parents/carers, Staff, and Pupils.
2. **Agreement with Policy**: The responses indicate whether the stakeholders agree with the proposed policy stance.

The data shows the count of IDs by stakeholder group and their agreement with the proposed policy stance. Parents/carers have 1659 agreeing and 353 disagreeing, pupils have 334 agreeing and 448 disagreeing, and staff have 402 agreeing and 87 disagreeing.

'Please identify which stakeholder group you belong to:' and 'Do you agree with the proposed policy stance above?'

Evaluative Summary of the Last Column:

The last column contains further summary comments from respondents. These comments provide additional context and opinions regarding the proposed policy stance. Here are some key themes observed in the comments:

- **Support for Policy**: Most respondents express strong support for the policy, highlighting issues such as distraction caused by mobile phones and the need for a strict enforcement policy.
- **Concerns and Suggestions**: Some respondents raise concerns about the practicality of enforcing the policy, the need for exceptions for medical reasons, and the importance of having alternative technology available for educational purposes.
- **Mixed Opinions**: There are mixed opinions on whether phones should be completely banned or allowed under certain conditions, such as being switched off during lessons but available during breaks for safety reasons.

Summary Comments:

- **Enforcement**: Clear enforcement guidelines and sanctions are necessary to support staff in implementing the policy effectively.
- **Technology Alternatives**: Schools should provide alternative technology, such as tablets, to ensure students can still access necessary resources without relying on mobile phones.
- **Safety Considerations**: Some respondents emphasise the importance of allowing phones for safety reasons, especially for pupils who walk to and from school alone.

Overall, the comments reflect a diverse range of opinions and highlight the need for a balanced approach to the policy that considers both educational and safety aspects.

School Policies – Possible layout

Name of Policy	*For example...* 'Disconnect to Reconnect' 'Switch off and Engage' 'Ready for learning, ready for life' 'Responsible Digital Citizens' Opportunity for pupil/staff/parent voice
Introduction	• Short paragraph to give purpose of policy and why it is needed
Rationale	• Linked to school vision and values • Purpose of strategy • Evidence to inform (from local authority guidance or local/national research)
Section 1 Procedures and Expectations	• Aligned to Positive Relationships Policy • What happens at start of school day • What happens during lessons in the event of mobile phone presence/use • What happens in event of any misuse • Potential to include video of what this would look like for a learner/learners in your school • Schools may wish to have posters/signs indicating 'Mobile-free Zone' around school building
Section 2 Frequently Asked Questions	• Why is this policy being introduced? • Does this happen elsewhere? • Will pupils have access to technology to support learning and if so, what will this be? • What should I do if I need to contact my child when they are at school? • As a pupil, how do you contact your parent/carer if required when at school? • What happens in an emergency situation (e.g. Fire Alarm)? • What if my child needs their phone for medical purposes? • What if my child requires to access certain apps to support learning?
Section 3 Positive Citizenship	• Link to Positive Behaviour Policy and other relevant school policies/expectations e.g. Learning and Teaching • How this information will be shared with stakeholders – e.g. website, communications etc