



Customer Services: Education

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To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

Misuse of mobile phones in schools by pupils

Concern has been growing in the recent past over reported instances of mobile phone misuse. These include text bullying, filming violent incidents, downloading inappropriate material and harassment of staff. The negative impact on learning and teaching is both evident and concerning. There is a broad consensus that this needs to be tackled in schools with Scottish Government and local authority support.

The majority of indiscipline and negative behaviour in schools is low level, and this will also be the case for misuse of mobile phones. Bullying, harassment and general misbehaviour, including more serious and occasional incidents of assault are not new. However, mobile phones have emerged as a tool in these forms of behaviour and it is timely to introduce a culture of appropriate and responsible use.

Equally concerning is the use of mobile phones, without permission, in classrooms. Mobile devices have become a significant distraction for those who own them, and to those around them. Even when on “silent” these devices still often light up or make subtle noise during lessons with incoming messages or alerts. When completely silenced, the child or young person’s desire to know if any calls or messages have come in, means they constantly check their phones when they should be concentrating on lessons. This habitual behavioural pattern is well documented for those of all ages. Further, significant evidence suggests mobile phones are being used for groups of children and young people to simultaneously leave lessons and miss out on valuable learning experiences to truant collectively.

Imposing an outright ban on bringing mobile phones into schools would not be appropriate. Most local authorities acknowledge that mobile phones have a part to play in

securing children and young people's personal safety before and after school and on journeys to and from school.

Neither do the majority of staff favour a ban on using mobile phones as when used in an appropriate manner, with permission, in lessons they can be a valuable tool for learning. Mobile phones have music players that can be used in art lessons; calculators for Maths; cameras to video technical displays or science experiments to replay later, for example. School policies should therefore reflect the positive uses of developing technologies.

Moreover, a ban would not be consistent with the aim of developing a culture of responsible mobile phone use by children and young people and ensuring we teach children and young people how to engage appropriately with the technology that adults in both their working and social lives engage with daily.

This guidance has been discussed in a range of forums and has been agreed by the teacher unions and accepted as policy through the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT).

All schools are required to adhere to this policy on the use of mobile phones. Consistency of application and standards of acceptable use, within the agreed parameters of local environment will ensure all members of our Argyll and Bute school communities are aware of a clarity of purpose and equity of application of the policy.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Customer Services

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Argyll and Bute Council
Customer Services - Education
Policy on the Use of Mobile Phones in Schools

Context

A policy which simply prohibits children and young people from taking mobile phones to school would be regarded as unreasonable. Many parents/carers would be concerned for health and safety reasons if their child were not allowed to carry a phone to and from school and might therefore be unable to contact them out-with school in respect of any situation that might arise. Parents should, of course, only contact children through the school office during school hours. It is also vital in this modern technological age that we teach our children and young people how to responsibly use the mobile devices which have been entrusted to them and teach them about the positive ways their devices can support and enhance their learning experiences.

However, mobile phones present a number of problems:

- They can significantly distract from learning and teaching;
- even when in silent mode, texts and alerts can undermine discipline across all learning environments;
- they are valuable items that may be stolen;
- their use can render children and young people subject to potential bullying;
- mobile phones with integrated cameras could lead to child protection and data protection issues about inappropriate capture, use or distribution of images.

The guidelines which follow, outline the expectations for schools and provide guidance to staff, *pupils and parents* about the consequences, if rules are broken.

Acceptable Use

While accepting the value of mobile phone technology, it is essential that children and young people's use of mobile phones does not impede teaching, learning and good order and discipline across all learning environments, and more widely across the school estate. For this reason, the following Education-wide policy will be adopted into each school policy on the use of mobile phones in schools.

Mobile phones should not be used within the learning environment, without the permission of the teacher; and only then if their use contributes to the enhancement of learning and teaching, or the welfare of the learner.

They may be used in an appropriate manner, in any social area agreed by the Head Teacher, before or after school, at breaks and during lunches. However, they must not be switched on during lesson/period changeovers. They must not be taken to the toilet during lessons.

Confiscation Procedure

First Occurrence

If a member of staff is aware that a child or young person is using a mobile phone in a learning environment without permission, then an initial verbal warning should be given, along with a reminder of the rationale behind limited mobile phone use.

Second Occurrence

If a second incident occurs, the child or young person will be asked to hand their phone over to the teacher until the end of the school day, when the child or young person may retrieve it from the school office. The member of staff should place the mobile phone immediately into a sealed envelope, clearly marked with the name of the child or young person and send or deliver the phone to the school office. The office will record the receipt of the phone and place it in the school safe until collection at the end of the school day. The phone should be signed for when retrieved.

**Mobile phones should not be physically removed from a pupil in any circumstance.*

Third Occurrence

If there is a further occurrence, committed by the same child or young person, in the same term, then the pupil will be asked to hand over their phone to the teacher, and it will only be returned to that child or young person's parent or carer in person. Again, the phone should be placed in a sealed envelope, with their name and held in the school office safe until a parent signs for it, when convenient for the parent to attend for collection. The Headteacher or DHT may agree, following a conversation with the parent/carer to hand

the phone to the child or young person directly. This parental agreement must be recorded.

Fourth Occurrence

If there is a fourth occurrence in the same term, parents/carers will be informed that the child or young person will no longer be permitted to carry a phone around the school, at any time of the day, for a specified period to be determined by the Head Teacher or DHT. Arrangements may be agreed for a child or young person to leave the phone on entry; and collect at the end of the day.

Consequences for refusing to hand over a mobile phone following an occurrence noted above.

In the event that a child or young person refuses to hand over their mobile phone following an occurrence, the issue should be referred to the line manager (PT / DHT / HT). In the event that this second opportunity to comply is not followed, a member of senior management or a Principal Teacher of Guidance / Support should call the parent for support either by phone or visit to the school.

In the event that the parent cannot get the child or young person to comply, then the HT/DHT may move to the Fourth Occurrence sanctions.

In the event that either the child or young person and/or their parents continue to fail to follow the school rules, the parent must be advised that the child or young person may be excluded noting the ability of the school to either exclude on the basis of ensuring the good order of the school; or because of non-cooperation by the parent.

Emergency Contact Procedure

Emergency contact to and from parents/carers must always be made through the school office. Parents/carers who disrupt the learning and teaching of both their child and others by calling during lessons will be required to meet with school staff to discuss the breaching of the policy. Continued failure by parents to adhere to school rules may lead to the temporary exclusion of their child from school based on the “non-co-operation of parents”.

Children and young people who feel unwell, must always contact home via the school office and not use their mobile phone at any time for such purposes. It is essential that the school knows when a child is feeling unwell in order that they can adhere to our Safeguarding policy and practice, and to ensure attendance records are both current and accurate. This also allows staff to monitor and support the child or young person who is

feeling unwell while they wait to be collected. Children and young people must not leave the school grounds without the knowledge and agreement of a member of staff.

Misuse

If a child or young person uses a phone to bully another such as sending threatening and/or abusive texts, the child or young person will be asked to hand over their mobile phone immediately, and the parents/carers informed of the matter. The incident may also be reported to the police. The phone will be returned to the parents/carers, and the child and young person will not be permitted to be in possession of a phone on school premises until such time as the Head Teacher deems appropriate.

If the child or young person fails to hand over their phone when requested, then the parent/carer should be given the opportunity to talk to their child in an effort to get them to agree. Additionally, the police should be called as a potential crime must be reported.

If such threatening or bullying incidents involving children and young people occur out-with school, then the parents/carers of the victim will be advised to contact the police.

Under no circumstances can a camera phone be used in the school grounds to take a photograph or video of a fellow child or young person or adults without their consent. If this occurs, then both parents/carers and police should be advised at the same time.

Schools will include a statement of this policy in the school handbook which is issued annually to parents/carers.

Supporting Advice, Guidance And Legislation

e.g.

- **Guidance on Developing Policies to Promote the Safe and Responsible Use of Mobile Technology in Schools (2013).**
- **GTCS Professional Guidance on the Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media:** www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/teacher-regulation/professional-guidance-ecomms-social-media.pdf
- **360 Degree Safe** is an online, interactive self-review tool which allows schools to review their esafety policy and practice: www.360safeScotland.org.uk

- **Respectme** Scotland’s Anti-Bullying Service. Information and advice on all aspects of bullying for practitioners, parents and pupils: www.respectme.org.uk
- **Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)**, UK police agency dedicated to protecting children from sexual abuse www.ceop.police.uk
- **Think U Know** A website for young people and their parents/carers and teachers. Run by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) www.thinkuknow.co.uk >
- **Childline** is the UK’s free, confidential helpline dedicated to children and young people www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111 >
- **Positive Relationships and Behaviour** - Education Scotland Links to information about approaches to developing positive relationships and behaviour and contact details for the Rights, Support and Wellbeing team: www.educationscotland.gov.uk/supportinglearners/positivelearningenvironments/positivebehaviour/index.as
- There are a number of aspects of the law that may apply to mobile phone misuse and the responses to that misuse. In the most serious cases there may be a crime involved – an incident that is being filmed might be an assault or breach of the peace.
- The misuse of a mobile phone might be an offence under the Communications Act 2003, if it involves a call or message that is grossly offensive or is of an indecent, obscene or menacing character; and the distribution of certain pornography might be an offence under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. In situations which are so serious that a school might call in the police it is for the police, not the school, to consider what, if any, criminal offence may apply.