



The Birley Academy

# Phone Free Policy

*The Birley Academy 2026/27*

## Procedure Management Log

|                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Document       | Mobile Phone Policy |
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## Guidance Used

1. University of Birmingham / *Lancet Regional Health Europe* study on smartphone policies and outcomes
2. BBC / Independent reporting on the same study
3. Beland & Murphy (2016), *Ill Communication: Technology, distraction & student performance*
4. (TES case study on pouch implementation and school improvement data)
5. UK Government case studies on mobile phone-free schools
6. King's College London "Pouch Study" research programme
7. School case reporting (e.g. Hitchin Boys' School, US district examples)



## Introduction and Rationale

In 2026, the Department for Education (DfE) published updated guidance setting a clear expectation that schools should operate as mobile phone-free environments by default. This represents a notable shift from managing mobile phone use to removing access throughout the school day, including during lessons, transitions, and social times. The guidance also applies to other smart devices with similar functionality. While non-statutory, it carries significant weight and is likely to inform how schools are understood through inspection and wider accountability.

At The Birley Academy, our agreed approach is the use of secure pouch systems, ensuring that mobile phones are brought into school but remain inaccessible throughout the day. This model aligns closely with the DfE's expectation of eliminating access, while providing a practical and consistent method that can be implemented at scale across our schools.

For secondary schools, this is not simply a policy change but a whole-school implementation priority. Success depends on clarity, consistency, and strong alignment between systems, staff expectations, and communication with pupils and families.

This policy is designed to provide guidance to all stakeholders ensuring a clear, consistent, and sustainable approach across the Academy.

The benefits of a phone free school are significant. These include:

### ***Safety and safeguarding reasons***

- Phones are addictive in nature and can be misused to record and immediately upload images / video / audio of staff or students without consent.
- Restricting use reduces risks linked to privacy and inappropriate content.
- Phones can be used for cyberbullying, taking photos or videos without consent, or spreading rumours.
- Protect students from online harassment during the school day.

### ***Happiness and Wellbeing of Students***

- Schools aim to teach balanced digital and communication habits.
- Limiting phone use helps students understand when technology is appropriate and when it is not
- Social media can increase anxiety, comparison, and fear of missing out (FOMO).
- Phone-free time reduces pressure to constantly check notifications and improves emotional wellbeing.
- Without phones, students are more likely to talk, play, and build face-to-face social skills during breaks and lunchtimes.
- Supports stronger relationships including improved communication, empathy, and friendship development.
- Less peer pressure to own latest and most expensive devices

### ***Improved concentration, engagement, learning and progress***

- Phones distract students with messages, games, and social media.
- Even silent phones can reduce attention and memory during lessons.
- Removing phones helps students stay focused on teaching and tasks reducing cognitive overload.
- Studies have shown that students—especially low prior attaining and disadvantaged pupils—often perform better when phone use is restricted.
- Lessons move faster and with fewer interruptions.
- Teachers spend less time policing phone use.
- Lessons are calmer, more structured, and easier to manage



### ***Government position on mobile phones***

- The government expects all schools to be mobile phone-free environments by default.
- Schools are expected to prohibit mobile phone use throughout the entire school day, including in lessons, between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.
- This expectation applies not just to phones but also to other smart devices with similar functions (e.g. messaging or recording).
- Schools are expected to have a clear, consistently enforced policy on mobile phone use that is understood by students, staff and parents.

## **Overview of Research**

A growing body of research and school-based evidence has explored the impact of mobile phone restriction in schools. While findings are nuanced, there is increasing practical and emerging empirical support for approaches that eliminate access to mobile phones during the school day - particularly where this is implemented consistently through systems such as secure pouches.

### **1. Evidence on mobile phone restriction in schools**

Research has consistently identified a link between high levels of smartphone use and poorer educational and behavioural outcomes, including lower attainment, disrupted sleep, and increased distraction. Earlier large-scale quantitative research in England found **that** introducing mobile phone bans was associated with improved pupil performance, with the greatest gains seen among lower-attaining students. However, more recent studies highlight an important limitation:

- Restrictive policies in isolation do not automatically improve attainment or wellbeing
- Broader factors (home use, social media habits, culture) remain significant

### ***Key implications for schools:***

Mobile phone policies are most effective when implemented as part of a wider behaviour, culture, and safeguarding strategy, rather than as a standalone intervention.

### **2. Evidence supporting “no access” approaches**

The Department for Education and sector guidance increasingly emphasise that policies which fully remove access during the school day are more effective than partial restrictions. Case study evidence shows that even in schools with existing bans, hidden phone use persists without robust systems, undermining policy impact.

This has led to a shift towards systems-based approaches (e.g. pouches, central storage), which:

- remove ambiguity
- reduce staff workload
- eliminate “grey areas” in enforcement

### **3. Evidence on pouch systems (i.e. Equivalent to the L.E.A.D. approach)**

Emerging school-level evidence suggests that lockable pouch systems are particularly effective in delivering consistent implementation. A UK secondary school implementing pouches reported significant improvements across multiple indicators:

- Attendance increased by 1.2%
- Persistent absence reduced by 8.2%
- Behaviour incidents linked to phones/social media reduced by 94%
- Safeguarding incidents linked to phones reduced by 81%



- No permanent exclusions in the year following implementation
- Marked improvement in GCSE outcomes (school ranked among most improved nationally)

Similarly, school case studies and reports highlight:

- improved classroom focus
- fewer behaviour incidents
- increased social interaction
- reductions in conflict and disruption

The impact appears strongest where access is physically prevented, rather than simply discouraged.

#### **4. Key conclusions from the evidence base**

Across research and practice, several consistent themes emerge:

- *Access matters more than policy wording:* Systems that remove access are more effective than rules alone
- *Implementation consistency is critical:* Weak enforcement significantly reduces impact
- *Whole-school and Trust alignment is essential:* Policies must sit within behaviour, safeguarding, and culture
- *Impact is strongest on behaviour and school climate:* Effects on attainment are more variable and indirect
- *Pouch systems provide a scalable, enforceable model:* Particularly effective in large secondary settings

## **Use of mobile phones by staff**

### **1. Modelling responsible behaviour**

We recognise that mobile phones are an integral part of everyday life for our staff. We expect staff to model responsible behaviour to our students. We ask staff not to use personal mobile phones when students are present, because:

- it does not set a professional and positive example to students and parents
- it has the potential to impact negatively on the students' learning
- it has the potential to reduce our ability to supervise students effectively and ensure their safety and wellbeing

Staff should ensure that their use of personal mobile phone is at all times in line with the ICT Acceptable Use Agreement and The Birley Academy's Staff Code of Conduct. All staff that are front facing with the Academy are issued with a mobile phone pouch where their mobile phone will be stored during the school day.

Under no circumstances should a personal mobile phone/device be used to take photographs of students.

### **2. Appropriate use of personal mobile phones for work purposes:**

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for staff to use personal mobile phones for work purposes, for example when accessing multi-factor authorisation apps. There may also be rare occasions where teaching staff use their personal mobile phone to log incidents of positive or negative behaviours via Class Charts and access urgent emails. In such cases, mobile phones should not remain visible once the necessary activity has been completed.



### **3. Staff use of school devices**

Some members of staff in school, for example, site staff, Designated Safeguarding Leads and pastoral team, may be issued with a school mobile phone, where they need to use one as part of their role. While recognising this, we ask these staff to minimise mobile phone use in corridors and that these calls are made from office bases.

### **4. Appropriate use of personal mobile phones**

The use of personal mobile phones must be restricted to non-contact time, and to areas of the school where students are not present (such as the staffroom). Staff should be mindful of colleagues when using phones.

There may be circumstances in which it is appropriate for a member of staff to use their mobile phone during contact time for personal reasons. For instance:

- for emergency contact by their child, or their child's school
- in the case of acutely ill dependents or family members - the management of a medical condition

This should be discussed with the appropriate Line Manager or the Headteacher.

### **5. Staff use of personal mobile phones on educational visits and residential visits**

While on an educational visit, staff are acting in loco parentis, and therefore need to ensure that appropriate supervision is in place at all times. Staff should not ordinarily access their personal mobile phones while directly supervising students, except in an emergency. Staff will be given a school mobile phone for the purpose of contacting students, parents/carers and school as needed.

Particularly when school trips run outside of normal working hours, or when they are not directly supervising students, we recognise that staff will want to access their mobile phones, but this should be done in a responsible and professional manner.

### **6. Communication with parents and outside agencies**

Staff should not use personal mobile phones to communicate with parents or outside agencies except in an emergency and must not give out their personal phone number for this purpose. If using their phone in an emergency, staff should ensure that their Caller ID is not visible (their phone number is not displayed). Call log history should be deleted immediately following the call to ensure the phone number is not saved on a member of staff's personal phone.

## **Use of mobile phones by students**

### **1. Bringing phones to school**

Students are encouraged to bring their mobile phone to school to safeguard themselves on the way to and from school, however this is done at their own risk. This means it is the student's responsibility to keep it safe, and the school will not accept responsibility for loss, damage or theft on the school premises, during school visits or trips, or while students are travelling to and from school.

### **2. Management of phones during the school day**

All students are issued with a mobile phone pouch when they join the Academy. It is the student's responsibility to look after the pouch throughout their time at the Academy and maintain this in the condition in which it was provided.

The following procedures are in place to manage mobile phone usage during the school day:



- On arrival at the Academy students are expected to unlock their pouch at the unlocking stations provided.
- Students are expected to arrive at the threshold with their pouch out in preparation for morning routines.
- At the start of each school day, each academy will have a morning routine that ensures all mobile phones are turned off and that each individual student places their mobile phone in the mobile phone pouch. Once in the pouch the pouch must be locked and placed in the students bag until the end of the day.
- As students exit the academy they are to unlock their mobile phone at the unlocking stations provided. This releases the phone and students then have access to their device.

Students may choose to place any other devices e.g. smart watches, air pods etc if they wish.

Students needing to contact home in an emergency should speak to a trusted adult where they will be supported to use a school telephone if deemed appropriate.

Students remaining after school for detention will **not** have access to their phone until they have been dismissed and exited the building.

#### **Exceptions on medical grounds**

Where students require access to their mobile phone for the direct management of a medical condition, such as those who wear a glucose monitor for diabetes, we will permit its use during the school day.

We expect these students to act responsibly in accordance with any individual agreements made. Parents or carers should contact the Headteacher to request such permission.

#### **Confiscation of mobile phones**

If a phone is seen or heard during the school day or found to be in a student's pocket, staff will confiscate it as a prohibited item.

Where a member of staff confiscates a mobile phone, it should be taken directly to Main Reception (or on-call should be requested to collect it) where it will be stored in a locked cabinet. Phones will be available for collection at the end of the school day.

Lost phones/pouches should be handed to any member of staff. The school will attempt to contact the owner where possible.

#### **Non-Compliance**

Students must follow the academy expectations on mobile phones. It is expected that all students follow instructions first time every time from any member of staff without question, including requests to hand over their phone. Where a student does not adhere to our expectations, sanctions will apply. See sanctions section on the following page.

### **Use of mobile phones by parents/carers, volunteers, and visitors on site**

We ask our visitors to refrain from using their mobile phones when students are present. If this is unavoidable, they must ensure that they:

- do not take pictures or recordings of students
- do not use phones in lessons, or when working with students

We ask contractors to ensure that they remain professional in their use of mobile phones on site.



Visitors will be informed of the rules for mobile phone use when they sign in at reception or attend a public event at school.

## Frequently Asked Questions

| Question                                                           | Answer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Why is the school introducing phone pouches?                       | The pouch system ensures phones aren't accessible during the school day, helping create a calm, focused environment that supports student wellbeing, behaviour and engagement.                                                                                                   |
| How does the pouch system work?                                    | Students place their phone into a locked Yondr pouch at the start of the school day. The pouch stays with the student throughout the day and is unlocked at the end using designated unlocking stations. The process is quick and students typically don't need to stop walking. |
| Can students still use their phones before and after school?       | Yes. Phones can be used before arriving at school and after leaving the school site. They're only secured during the school day.                                                                                                                                                 |
| Can phones be used for learning in lessons?                        | No. All learning resources are provided by the school, so students don't need personal mobile devices during lessons.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Is my child's phone secure in the pouch?                           | Yes. The phone stays with the student throughout the day in a secure pouch. The pouch offers some additional protection, though it shouldn't replace a protective case or screen protector.                                                                                      |
| What if my child needs their phone for medical reasons?            | Where appropriate, students may be issued with an alternative pouch, such as a Velcro or non-locking version, to support approved medical needs like diabetes monitoring apps. These arrangements are agreed in advance with the school.                                         |
| What about smart watches, Air Pods and other electronical devices? | Students can still bring these items to school for use before and after the day. They can be placed inside the pouch if students wish.                                                                                                                                           |
| What happens during an emergency?                                  | Students follow staff instructions and school safety procedures. Phone use during emergencies can delay responses and spread misinformation, so all communication with families is managed directly through the school.                                                          |
| How can I contact my child during the school day?                  | Contact the school office. Urgent messages will be passed on promptly. If a student needs to contact home, office staff will support them.                                                                                                                                       |
| What happens if a phone is seen outside the pouch?                 | The phone will be confiscated and returned in line with the school behaviour policy. Searches may also be carried out where staff reasonably believe a student is concealing a phone.                                                                                            |
| What happens if a pouch is forgotten, damaged or tampered with?    | If a pouch is forgotten, the phone will be securely stored in the school office until the end of the day. Accidental                                                                                                                                                             |





|                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                        | damage should be reported immediately. Intentional damage or tampering, including using magnets, will be treated as a serious behaviour matter and may result in sanctions or replacement charges. |
| What happens if my child arrives late or leaves early? | The school office has an unlocking device available for students who arrive late or need to leave early for appointments or other authorised reasons.                                              |
| What happens if my child refuses to use the pouch?     | Non-compliance with the pouch system is treated as a serious issue and is dealt with in line with the academy's behaviour and phone-free policies.                                                 |

## Rewards

Celebrating the success of our students is essential for acknowledging the high standards, dedication, achievements, and respect they consistently demonstrate. By recognising their efforts, we inspire continued growth, foster a culture of excellence, and motivate others to follow suit. Celebrating student conduct and efforts reinforces the values of hard work, perseverance, and mutual respect, helping students feel valued and supported as they continue their educational journey.

As part of our Tutor Programme it is expected that all Form Tutors check equipment daily. The mobile phone pouch forms part of a student's daily equipment. Students are rewarded for bringing their equipment daily and this is logged on Class Charts. Bringing the mobile phone pouch to school and respectfully looking after this will accumulate rewards points weekly.

## Non-Compliance

| Scenario                                                             | Sanction                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Student forgets to bring their phone pouch to school                 | Mobile phone is handed in and collected at the end of the school day                                                                           |
| Refusal to place phone in pouch                                      | Isolation until full compliance achieved<br>Repeated refusal may result in suspension                                                          |
| Student loses phone pouch                                            | Mobile phone is handed in and collected at the end of the school day<br>Parent/carer to pay for a replacement pouch                            |
| Second 'decoy' phone brought to school                               | Isolation until full compliance achieved<br>Repeated refusal may result in suspension                                                          |
| Dishonest compliance – failure to lock pouch                         | Isolation until full compliance achieved<br>Repeated refusal may result in suspension                                                          |
| Dishonest compliance – passing phone to a friend                     | Isolation until full compliance achieved<br>Student(s) to be searched using a metal detector wand<br>Repeated refusal may result in suspension |
| Dishonest compliance – stating they do not have a phone when they do | Isolation until full compliance achieved<br>Student(s) to be searched using a metal detector wand<br>Repeated refusal may result in suspension |
| Accessing an unlocking station during the school day                 | Minimum 1 day isolation                                                                                                                        |



|                                        |                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bringing in a device to unlock pouch   | Minimum 1 day isolation but this may result in suspension                                                                          |
| Deliberate damage or graffiti to pouch | Minimum 1 day isolation<br>Parents/carers to pay for a replacement pouch<br>Phone to be handed in until replacement pouch in place |

## Powers of search and confiscation

The Birley Academy operates within the two sets of legal provisions which enable the academy staff to confiscate items from students.

The general power to discipline enables a member of staff to confiscate, retain or dispose of a student's property as a punishment, so long as it is reasonable in the circumstances. The law protects staff from liability for damage to, or loss of, any confiscated items provided they have acted lawfully.

Under common law, school staff have the power to search a student for any item. This includes an unpouched mobile phone. If a student refuses to cooperate, the member of staff may sanction the student in line with the school's behaviour policy, ensuring that they are responding to misbehaviour consistently and fairly.

If a student continues to refuse to cooperate, the Academy will follow the protocols outlined in the Behaviour Policy.

Following the confiscation of the mobile phone it is for The Birley Academy to decide when this item will be returned. This can be seen in the sanctions section of the policy.

When conducting a search an appropriate location for a search will be found and will be conducted away from other students. The staff conducting the search will be of the same sex as the student being searched. There will be another member of staff present as a witness to the search.

A member of staff can search a student of the opposite sex and/or with or without a witness present only:

- If the member of staff conducting the search reasonably believes there is a risk that serious harm will be caused to a person if the search is not conducted as a matter of urgency; **and**
- In the time available, it is not reasonably practicable for the search to be conducted by a member of staff who is the same sex of the student, or it is not reasonably practicable for the search to be conducted in the presence of another member of staff.

If a search is conducted without a witness, the member of staff who conducted the search will immediately report this to another member of staff and ensure a record of the search is kept.

A member of staff may search a student's outer clothing, pockets, possessions including their bag. Staff conducting the search must not require the student to remove any clothing other than outer clothing. 'Outer clothing' means any item of clothing that is not worn wholly next to the skin or immediately over a garment that is being worn as underwear, as well as hats, shoes, boots or scarves.

'Possessions' means any goods over which the student has or appears to have control – this includes bags.



This policy relates to other academy policies

- Behaviour
- Suspensions and Exclusions
- Safeguarding policy