



ST MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL, NEWRY

Mobile Phone Policy

Revised June 2025

REFERENCE: DENI CIRCULAR 2024/14

OPTIMUM SEMPER FACERE 'ALWAYS TO DO ONES BEST'

'Our vision is to educate, empower and support the students in our school to reach their full potential by focusing on their holistic development and as a Rights Respecting School, embrace the opportunities of living according to the Catholic Faith and celebrating diversity'

RATIONALE:

Digital Technology including the use of mobile phones has become embedded throughout society and has transformed the way we communicate, access information and interact with each other and organisations; This is especially true for young people. In St Mary's, we embrace the use of Digital Technology in the learning process and support our students to navigate and make sense of the digital world they live in. Our main priority is to create a safe, supportive learning environment where all students and staff are respected, valued and can achieve their full potential.

The Department of Education Circular 2024/14 outlines the responsibility of schools to actively limit student use of mobile phones during the school day, to create a learning environment that supports safety, mutual respect and effective teaching and learning.

Mobile phones, in particular, the new generation of smart phones, now include additional functions such as integrated camera, video recording, instant messaging and mobile access to the internet including access to social media sites such as X, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp.

The use of mobile phones by students in school interrupts learning and teaching, infringes the privacy rights of the whole school community and can lead to Child Protection issues regarding the inappropriate distribution of messages, images and audio recordings. As a result, students' wellbeing and mental health and consequently their educational progress is being affected negatively through the overuse and misuse of mobile phone technology.

Both the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have recognised that the use of digital devices such as mobile phones during the school day can negatively impact on students' academic performance.

This policy wishes to strike a balance between the positive and negative aspects of mobile phone technology acknowledging that it is not realistic to prohibit students from taking phones to school.

In St Mary's the School Governors and Staff accept that most students own a mobile phone. However, it is their responsibility to maintain a safe, nurturing learning environment which respects the privacy and dignity of all members of our school community. Due to this primary concern, it is school policy that there is no need for students to use their mobile phones during the school day and are not permitted to do so from 8:55am to 3:00pm.

PROCEDURES:

The procedures outlined in this policy aim to promote responsible use of mobile phones. This policy applies to all students in St Mary's.

Should Parents/Carers choose to allow their daughter to bring her mobile phone or electronic device into school, please note the following rules will apply:

- Mobile phones should not be used in school from 8:55am to 3:00pm. Mobile phones are not permitted to be used in classrooms or on the corridors/stairways
- Mobile phones and earphones/headsets must be **'On silent and out of sight'**
- Mobile accessories and wearables such as Smart Watches, Fitbits and other monitoring devices must be **'On silent'**
- The school will not accept responsibility for mobile phones and electronic devices that are taken into school
- Students can ask at the main office if they need to contact their Parent/Carer urgently during school hours and they will be permitted to phone home
- Mobile phones should be **'On silent and out of sight'** at all times. Mobile phones must be kept in the inner pocket of the school blazer. **Any phone seen or heard will be retained.** *The only exception to this is when a student has been given special permission to keep their phone with them for specific health-related reasons as detailed in their IEP or Health Plan*
- Any member of staff (including support staff and temporary teaching staff) can retain a mobile phone from a student
- **If a phone is retained, it will be left with the Vice Principal in a sealed envelope.**
The following stepped approach will apply if a phone is retained:
 - ✚ **First Occasion:** Phone will be returned to the student at 3pm
 - ✚ **Second Occasion:** Parent/Carer can phone the Vice Principal and request that the phone is returned to the student at 3pm
 - ✚ **Third Occasion and subsequent occasions:** A Parent/Carer must come up to the school to collect the phone. The Parent/Carer can collect the phone between 3pm and 4:15pm that day or the next working day
- Mobile phones may only be used in class for educational purposes under the direction of the Class Teacher including access to Online Learning Platforms
- **Mobile phones are prohibited in the PE Changing Rooms.** They must be placed in a sealed wallet (along with any other valuables) which are locked away in the PE Office
- Parents/Carers who need to urgently contact their daughter during the school day can do so by calling the School Office. **Parents/Carers are advised not to text or phone their daughter on their mobile phone.**
- When after-school activities are cancelled, this will be communicated to Parents/Carers via the School App. All Parents/Carers are asked to download the School App
- If a student refuses to hand over their mobile phone, their Parent/Carer will be contacted and asked to come to the school to collect the phone from their daughter

Safeguarding

Where a student has breached the school rules and has used a mobile device to collect data (for instance recording audio, photographs or video), during school time, this will be considered as a potential safeguarding issue. Taking Photographs, Audio or Video Recording which capture another individual without their permission, while in school, can constitute as a child safeguarding issue, as this data can be posted online and manipulated to be used to bully or intimidate others. Where it has been reported that a student has captured audio, video of digital data while in school, without the authority of the school, this will be considered as a disciplinary matter and the student will be asked to permanently delete the data which was captured on the mobile device. Parents and Carers will also be informed.

School Examinations

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) requires all examination centres to reinforce the rules and regulations about unauthorised items during external examinations. Potential technological/ web-enabled sources of information such as mobile phones, iPods, MP3/4 players, fitness trackers or watches are not permitted in the examination room. If a student is found to be in possession of any unauthorised item after the start of the examination, the device will be retained and a full report will be submitted to the examination board, who will take the necessary action in accordance with the JCQ Rules and Regulations on Malpractice. This may result in a disqualification.

As a result of the JCQ Guidance, students who are sitting any school examinations are not permitted to be in possession of a watch or any other potential technological/ web enabled sources of information such as Mobile Phones, Smart Watches, Fitbits or any similar devices. If such a device sounds during an internal examination, even if no obvious advantage is gained, the student will lose their marks for the paper.

Related Whole School Policies:

The school has a duty to ensure that safeguarding permeates all activities and functions.

This policy therefore complements and supports a range of other school policies including:

- Child Protection Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Digital Learning Policy
- Bring Your Own Device Policy
- E Safety Policy
- CRED Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Preventative Curriculum Policy
- RSE Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Learning Support Policy
- GDPR/Data Protection Policy
- Educational Visits Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

These policies are available to Parents and Carers on the School Website and School App.

Consultation:

During the review of this document consultation took place with the following groups:

Students – through the Rights Respecting Council

Parents/Carers

Staff

Board of Governors

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review:

Mr Fitzpatrick, the Designated Teacher for Child Protection, is responsible for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the implementation of the Mobile Phone Policy. Mr Fitzpatrick will update the Policy and Procedures in light of any further guidance and legislation as necessary and review it annually. This will be done in consultation with the Safeguarding Team, Governors, Staff, Students and Parents/Carers.

On-going evaluation will ensure the effectiveness of the Policy

Signed by Chair of Governors: _____

Date: _____

Signed by Principal: _____

Date: _____

Date of Review: __May 2028_____