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Dear Parents,

School Mobile Phone Policy

You may have heard that the government has recently banned the use of mobile phones in school - **it is prohibited for children to use their personal mobile phones in school. This includes smart watches where the messaging app has been enabled.**

For a number of years now we have operated a fairly simple approach to the use of mobile phones in our schools - children don't use them. The only children who are allowed to bring mobile phones into school are those in Years 5 and 6 and who have written permission to walk home by themselves. No other child should bring a mobile phone into the school. Those in Year 5 and 6, with the correct permissions in place should hand-in their phone to their class teacher, or school office, who will provide a designated safe location for it during the school day. On the whole, this works really well and at present we see no reason to change that approach. Staff have the right to search a child's bag/locker if they suspect that they have concealed a mobile phone. If one is found then the Head of School will confiscate it and contact parents.

Children's mobile phone use: facts and figures

- By age 11, around nine in ten children own a mobile phone (Ofcom).
- The majority of 8-11-year-olds (63%) use social media and messaging apps. This rises to 93% for children between 12 and 15 years old. (Ofcom)
- 29% of secondary school pupils (rising to 40% for KS4 pupils) reported mobile phones being used without permission in most of their lessons. (The National Behaviour Survey (2021-2022))
- Several countries, including France and the Netherlands, have introduced restrictions on mobile phone use in schools
- High Screen time can displace activities important for children's health and wellbeing (RCPCH, 2019)
- One in five children have experienced bullying online. (Office of National Statistics; 2020)

Government Advice on what parents can do to help protect children online?

As parents, you play an essential role in protecting your children online and there are lots of ways you can help to minimise the risks and increase awareness of the online world. To help you start discussing some of the issues regarding mobile phone use and the internet, we have listed some of the ways you can do this below:

- **Talk** to your children about why it is important to stay safe online. Explain that whilst the internet is a fun, exciting and knowledge-rich tool, it is also a place where people may wish to bring them into dangerous activities or expose them to harmful material. It is important to be clear that you are not saying your child may never use the internet again, or that everything on it is harmful – it is about teaching them to have a greater awareness and to be able to manage and report any risks.
- Only give your children devices or access to **devices that you feel comfortable with**, and not as a result of peer-pressure deriving from their classmates and/or friends who are also using those devices.
- Discuss **rules** for being online and draw them up together, including which sites, games, etc., are acceptable. If certain games are off-limits, try to explain why – for example, because of excessive violence. If your child uses online gaming, consider setting rules such as only talking to others in the same age range and having the conversation on speaker, rather than headphones, so you can monitor it.
- Discuss what information should be **private** and what is ok to share; for example, addresses and names. Names should never be given out to strangers online, as this could allow them to identify where your child goes to school or lives.
- Keep an **open dialogue** with your child – letting them know they can always talk to you about anything that has made them feel uncomfortable online is key to keeping them safe.
- Set **parental controls** – do this as a dialogue with your child so that they are aware of what they are not allowed to view; however, do not rely on parental controls on devices, as they are not always 100 percent effective, and many children know how to bypass them.
- Make sure your child knows how to **report or 'block' unsuitable content**, **messages or people online** – show them how to block on the websites or games they frequently use and explain that they can always tell you, a teacher or another adult if they experience anything which makes them feel uncomfortable.

Here are some other resources you can use to help you protect your children online:

- NSPCC – 'Talking to your child about online safety' (https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-child-online-safety/)
- Childnet – 'Have a conversation' (https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/have-a-conversation/)
- Thinkuknow (CEOP Education)
- UK Safer Internet Centre (https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers

If you have any questions related to this topic then please do not hesitate to contact your child's school.

David Hopkins
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