Braunton Learning Cooperative Trust (BLCT)

Smartphone Free Schools

Policy

Purpose:

To establish clarity around expectations for a Smartphone Free School and to ensure a safe, focused, and conducive learning environment for all students.

Scope:

This policy applies to all students of schools within the Braunton Learning Cooperative Trust (BLCT).

Aim of the policy:
To allow all our children to flourish in our environment by:

- Maintaining the highest standards of education through distraction and disruption free school environments
- Ensure the maximum level of safeguarding, health and wellbeing of students on the school site and in our wider community

Policy Statements for all schools:

1. We are a Smartphone Free School.
2. We make a clear distinction between a simple phone (without the potential for internet access) and a smartphone or any smart device (with internet or potential internet access).
3. Students are prohibited from bringing any smartphone or smart devices into school.
4. The policy mitigates the safeguarding, health and safety risks related to early access to smart devices and supports the school site being a safe environment for all students.
5. The policy supports families to make their own decision about when it is appropriate for their child to have access to smart technology.
6. The policy is enforced with significant consequences for students who bring smartphones into school.

Please note that throughout this policy smartphone refers to any electronic device with potential access to the internet. This includes Kindles, tablets and smart watches.

Smartphones and other pocket smart devices that access the internet are prohibited from September 2025. This policy has been introduced to minimise disruption to the school environment and to help tackle cyber bullying, sexting, sharing of indecent images, online grooming and device addiction. The impact of smartphones on children's mental health and development is well documented. Excessive exposure to social media platforms can increase anxiety, depression and even lead to suicidal ideation.

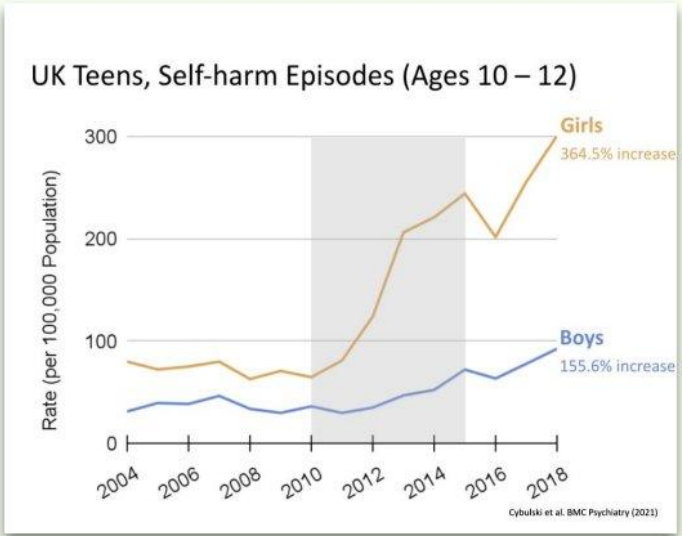
Rationale:
Over the past two years a significant number of studies have been completed providing robust evidence of the harm of smartphones on the learning, behaviour, wellbeing and safety of children when provided with access at an early age.

51%
of UK 11-13 year-olds have seen hardcore pornography online
British Board of Film Classification Report, March 2022

75%
of UK 15 year olds questioned had been sent beheading videos
Digital Childhoods, children's commissioner report, 2022

90%
of girls and 50% of boys say they are sent unwanted explicit content
Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools, 2021

SMARTPHONES ARE FUELLING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS



3x

Teens with problematic smartphone-use are three times as likely to have depression

King's College London, 2024

SMARTPHONES AFFECT ALL ASPECTS OF SCHOOL LIFE

ATTENTION
Bedtime use of smartphones doubles children's risk of poor sleep, hindering their learning

BULLYING
84% of bullying now takes place on a device, spilling into the school day

ROAD SAFETY
Mobile phone distraction is a major cause of road accidents involving children

FIGHTS
Teachers tell us fights escalate more because students are filming them

SOCIALISING
Smartphones reduce face to face socialising at break and lunchtimes

CRIME
500 children a day were mugged in 2020 in the UK, almost all for smartphones

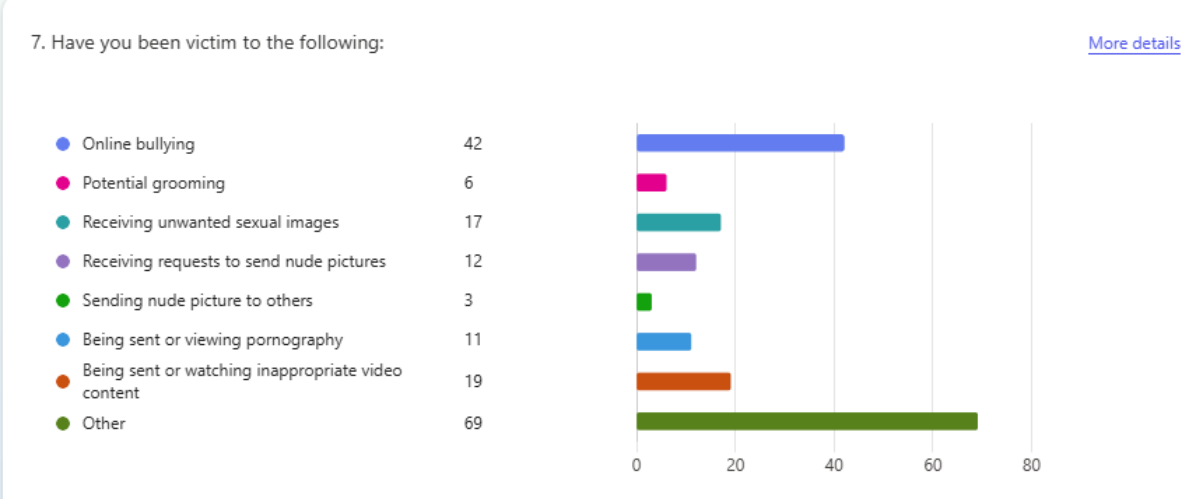
1: Jama Paediatrics, 2016; 2: Ofcom, 2022; 5: LookUp; 6: ONS, 2020

The Trust survey of current primary and secondary school parents and carers (439 people completed the survey) and school survey of children at Braunton Academy (371 students completed the survey) showed that over 38% of parents and careers only check their child's content either once a month or never.

87% of parents and carers said they were worried about the content their child was being exposed to and 56% of parents and carers said they were worried about the amount of time their child spent on their smart phone. 65% of parents and carers said that a smart phone free policy would have supported them in delaying their child access to smart devices.

When surveying the student population of Braunton Academy 64% of students said their parents and carers either never or only checked their phone content or use once a month. 50% of students also shared that they have unsupervised access to their smart devices overnight in their bedrooms.

Students also identified that they had been victims of bullying and crime related to online phone use:



The school is responsible for safeguarding students during the school day; this job has become increasingly difficult due to students coming into school with smart devices that potentially have harmful or inappropriate content on them and functions that enable inappropriate behaviour or cyberbullying e.g. access to social media, photo and video capability.

Please scan the QR code to watch the Smartphone Free Childhood presentation that was shared during the consultation evening events.

Reception – Year 4 Students

- Students in Years 4 or below are not allowed to bring any type of phone to school. However, if there is a specific reason that you feel your child needs to bring a simple phone in before the age of Year 5, please approach your

school's Headteacher to discuss this as individual arrangements can be made if appropriate.

Years 5 & 6 Students

- Parents and Carers who wish their child to carry a mobile phone to school must adhere to this policy. The phone must not have internet access and must not have a camera. The following phones are recommended due to cost, functions and durability: Nokia 105, Samsung E1200 or Alcatel 10.16G. Any non-approved phone will be confiscated.



Nokia 105



Samsung E1200



Alcatel 10.16G

- The phone must be clearly marked with the pupil's name.
- The phone must be switched off and handed in to a member of staff at the start of the day and will be returned to the pupil at the end of the day.
- In addition to this, smartwatches and any other pocket-sized devices that can enable a pupil to access the internet are not permitted. If such a device is seen, these will be confiscated too.
- Simple GPS trackers such as AirTags or the equivalent are permitted, if Parents and Carers want to track their child's location.

Reasonable adjustments and flexibility will be made for certain disabilities or medical conditions. In each instance, this needs to be pre-arranged with the Headteacher who will work with Parents or Carers to determine the specific needs of each pupil on an individual basis. Only the Headteacher may grant exemption for a pupil to have a device with internet access in school.

Sanctions
Confiscated phones will be handed into our Office Staff and the Parent or Carer will be notified. The Parent or Carer will need to collect any confiscated phones.

If needed, the pupil will be allowed to use a school phone to contact their Parents / Carers before they leave the school.

Educational Visits and Residentials
The school's Smartphone-Free Schools Policy is relevant to all educational visits and residentials.
Staff on residential trips will have access to phones for pupils to contact Parents / Carers if necessary.

Years 7 -11 Students

Parents / carers who wish their child to carry a mobile phone to school must adhere to the following policy.

- The phone must be one of the following types: Nokia 105 (approx. £13.50), Samsung E1200 (approx. £69) or Alcatel 10.16G (approx. £19.99) or other phone that must have:
    - No potential to access the internet
    - No photo or recording capability
    - No access to any apps.
- Any non-approved phone will be classified as a 'prohibited phone' and confiscated (see below).

Approved phones



Nokia 105



Samsung E1200



Alcatel 10.16G

- The phone must be clearly marked with the student's name.
- The phone must be switched off before the student enters the school site and placed in their school bag.
- The phone must not be brought out of their bag at any point during the school day and should only be used after school when the student is out of sight of the school entrances.
- The phone remains the responsibility of the student at all times and the school will not take action if it is lost or stolen.
- In addition to smartphone, all smart watches and any other pocket-sized devices that can enable a student to access the internet are prohibited. If such devices are discovered/ seen, then the same sanction will be given as for a prohibited phone on the school site.
- Any phone that is seen outside of a school bag or heard during the school day (school approved or otherwise) will automatically be confiscated (please see consequences section for information on confiscation periods).
- Simple GPS trackers such as Airtags or the equivalent are permitted if parents or carers want to track their child's location.

Reasonable adjustments and flexibility will be made for certain disabilities or medical conditions. In each instance this needs to be prearranged with the school and the

school will work with parents and carers to determine the specific needs of each student on an individual basis. Only the Headteacher may exempt a student from this policy.

Searching for devices
There may be occasions where a member of staff is required to search a student's personal belongings to look for a mobile phone or other banned item, if this is deemed necessary to maintain high standards of behaviour and a safe environment. Any such search will be conducted in accordance with the DfE guidance on searching and screening.

- If during a search an 'approved phone' is found it will not be confiscated provided it does not contain any evidence relating to an investigation AND when it is found it is switched off.
- All prohibited phones and approved phones that are not switched off AND in a school bag will automatically be confiscated as part of a search. This confiscation will follow the consequence process below.
- Students that have previously brought banned items into school including smart phones are subject to periodical bag searches as part of their ongoing risk assessment to always ensure the highest levels of safeguarding.

Immediate confiscation
- Any phone that is seen outside of a school bag or heard during the school day (approved or otherwise) will automatically be confiscated.
- Any prohibited phone which is seen before or after school, within sight of the school entrances will automatically be confiscated.

Consequences
Any phone that is seen outside of a school bag or heard during the school day (school approved or otherwise) will automatically be confiscated. This includes phones that have been heard from within a student's uniform or bag.
- When a phone is confiscated, it will be handed in at reception and locked away.
- When an approved simple phone is confiscated, it will be securely locked away until collection by a parent at the end of the day.
- Prohibited phones will be securely locked away and returned after four weeks of term time.
    - If the four weeks ends during a school holiday, student receive their phone back on return to school, and not before (two weeks primary schools).
    - There will be no option for the SIM card to be removed – it will be confiscated and kept along with the phone.
    - If needed, the student will be allowed to use a school phone to contact their parents/carers before they leave the school.
- A student refusing to hand over their phone will be immediately taken to internal exclusion and held for a parent to come into school to support the confiscation of the phone.
- A student that continues to refuse to hand over their phone by the end of the day will be given a 1-day fixed term exclusion and will have to hand over their smartphone for confiscation on return from the exclusion. Failure to do so will result in further exclusions until the phone is handed over.

Trips and Residentials

The school's smartphone policy remains the same on all trips and residentials.

On residentials students can have access to their non-smartphone during social times. However, 'family rules' apply overnight with all simple phones being handed to the staff member to keep overnight. Please see the school trips policy for further information.

Appendix 1: Consequence Flow Diagram

Student seen with phone in their pocket
Student phone goes off in their school bag or pocket
Student is caught checking their phone on or around the school site
A bag search finds a smart phone in their bag
A bag search finds a simple phone turned on in their bag



Phone is confiscated



It is a simple phone



Parents/carers contacted to collect the phone from the school office at their earliest convenience



It is a smart phone



The phone is confiscated for 4 weeks (2 weeks primary schools).

Appendix 2 - **Smartphone-Free School: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

How other schools across the UK have successfully implemented a 'simple phones only' policy and addressed common concerns

1. **Do schools have a legal right to keep a child's phone.**
   Yes, the DfE guidance allows schools to confiscate property. As part of the consultation process, we have spoken to our local police team they have confirmed we have a legal right to do so and that they support our right to confiscate property as this is a civil matter and supported by DFE guidance. Ofsted supports schools' rights to confiscation of banned items in line with the DFE guidance. Link to the DFE documentation Searching, Screening and Confiscation

2. **How can I contact my child if they do not have a smartphone?**
   There will be no change during school hours, as students are not permitted to use mobile phones during this time. If communication is required, it should be directed through the school office, as per existing protocols. Importantly, this is not a total ban on mobile phones. If you feel it is necessary for your child to have a means of communication during their journey to and from school, a basic (non-smart) phone enables this while avoiding the risks associated with smartphone use. This approach supports a safer and more focused school environment by reducing exposure to potential harms from both their own and others' smartphones.

3. **I want to be able to track my child.**
   There are basic tracking solutions available that do not involve smartphones. Devices such as Apple AirTags or similar alternatives allow parents and carers to monitor a child's location at school and to and from school without providing internet access, camera facility or social media exposure.

4. **My child's smartphone has parental controls—isn't that safe enough?**
   While parental controls can be helpful, they are not foolproof. A recent Parentkind poll revealed that 47% of children with parental controls had managed to bypass them. Schools cannot verify or monitor the settings on every student's device and must consider broader risks, including exposure to appropriate content via other students' phones, being photographed or filmed without consent at school and having the content shared or uploaded to the internet. Smartphones are designed to be engaging and, in many cases, addictive. With children receiving hundreds of notifications daily, it is unrealistic to expect parents and carers to monitor all activity. A smartphone-free school environment minimizes these risks and helps protect children's mental well-being and development.

5. **Do I have to buy a simple phone for my child?**
   No, there is no obligation to provide your child with any phone. However, if you wish to maintain communication with your child outside school hours, a simple mobile phone is an affordable option. These devices typically cost between £15–£50 new, and under £10 second-hand. Pay-as-you-go SIM cards are often free, and contracts offering unlimited calls and texts can be found for as little as £3–£4 per month. As they do not use mobile data, ongoing costs remain low.

6. **I want to decide when my child gets a smartphone.**
   Absolutely. Parents and carers know their children best and should make decisions about smartphone use based on their own judgment. A smartphone-free school policy supports this by maintaining a neutral environment. Parents and carers who feel their child is ready for a smartphone can introduce one at home, while those who feel their child is not yet emotionally prepared can send them to school with the confidence that they won't be exposed to inappropriate content or peer pressure from other students' devices or be photographed or filmed without consent. This approach not only helps to safeguard children at school, it helps level the playing field, reducing social pressure and preventing any student from feeling excluded—whether they have a smartphone or not.

7. **My child needs a phone to pay for the bus.**
   While many people use apps for bus fares, physical smart cards are a widely available and convenient alternative. These cards can be topped up online or directly on the bus, including throughout North Devon. It's worth noting that many schools across major towns and cities have already adopted smartphone-free policies. Students are managing complex journeys using public transport without smartphones—demonstrating that this is entirely achievable. Link o devon bus information: Weekly and longer tickets - Travel Devon

8. **My child has a medical condition or special educational need and requires a phone.**
   If there are exceptional circumstances that necessitate your child having access to a phone during the school day, please contact the school directly to discuss appropriate arrangements.

9. **Don't students need smartphones for homework?**
   This is a common misconception. There is no requirement for students to own a smartphone in secondary school. If homework requires internet access, parents and carers are free to choose the most appropriate device for home use. This may be a smartphone, tablet, or computer—whichever suits your household best. Students also have daily access to computers before school, break, lunchtime and homework club afterschool in the library. However, to clarify: no student is required to have a smartphone to complete schoolwork during the school day or on their journey to and from school.