



## Circular 0044/2025

To: Managerial Authorities, and Principals of Recognised Primary Schools, the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards

### **Banning the use of and access to personal mobile phones by pupils during the school day**

Schools are required to implement a policy to ban the use of and access to, personal mobile phones by pupils in all recognised schools for the duration of the school day.

This policy is intended to support schools, in

- improving the learning environment in schools by reducing distraction
- reducing the risk of cyberbullying and access to inappropriate content during school hours
- increasing traditional social interactions between pupils and students at school break times.

While schools are already managing the use of personal mobile phones by pupils during the school day through existing policies, including the Acceptable Use Policy, schools are now expected to formalise and implement a policy to prohibit fully the use of personal mobile phones by pupils during the school day, including during breaks and at lunchtime. This policy should be published on the school website and made available to pupils and parents and be subject to ongoing review as needed.

This policy will build on the existing school policies in this area and will enable children to disconnect from their online world and connect more with their peers for the duration of the school day.

The ban on the use of phones does not apply to travel to and from school, or once after school activities have concluded, which can be managed in accordance with schools' discretionary procedures.

Consultation with the school community is a key feature of this measure and can support the alignment of approaches between school and home.



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## Background

- Schools play a vital role in promoting wellbeing and mental health by equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to deal with the challenges that may impact on their wellbeing.
- It is recognised that technology is ever evolving and increasingly part of everyday life.
- The department recognises the need to build digital competence and an effective digital education ecosystem, so as to develop competent, critically engaged and active learners. This need to support children to reach their potential and participate fully as global citizens in a digital world is central to department policy. This is provided for through the curriculum at all levels, the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027, the STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026, and the Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy. Online safety and the safe and ethical use of the internet by children and young people is a key component of the digital strategy. The strategy supports an extensive array of training materials and resources developed and provided by Webwise, the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre, to support teachers, students and parents with online safety. Further information on these resources is provided below. Specific programmes to support schools and parents in this area have been developed, including the Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free guidance, and the Agree-to-Agree initiative, detailed further below.
- Excessive mobile phone use, and screen time generally, can have a detrimental impact on pupils' concentration and academic performance. Ensuring that pupils are not using their mobile phone for personal use during the school day can help to address these issues and foster an environment



conducive to learning, as well as supporting in-person engagement with peers.

- The policy to ban the use of phones by pupils during the school day, outside of limited exceptions, will enable schools to provide a phone-free environment, to support pupils' wellbeing, concentration, academic performance, and development. It will provide a space for children to disconnect from their online world and can assist in supporting them to become less dependent on their mobile phones. Research including the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report "Technology in Education a tool on whose terms", and the Norwegian Screen Use Committee Report which examines the impact of the use of mobile phones during the school day on wellbeing and academic performance, will continue to inform Department policy and resources in this area.

### **Purpose of the Guidance**

This guidance outlines the steps that schools should take to implement this approach and also outlines the supports that the department has in place to equip children with the knowledge and skills to navigate the online world in a safe and ethical manner. This includes comprehensive advice for parents/guardians, children and young people, as well as resources for schools and teachers.

### **The use of digital technology in teaching, learning and assessment**

The department's policy on the embedding of digital technologies in education is outlined in the [Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027](#), and its associated Implementation Plan.

The strategy aims to realise the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students so that all learners have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills they need to successfully navigate an ever-evolving digital world. This approach reflects the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) digital rights which, while it includes that the right to protection and safety in the digital environment underpins all children's rights, since the risk of harm in the digital environment has real consequences for a child's wellbeing, also states that the right to education today includes digital literacy, and to opportunities and resources to learn in the digital environment.

In consulting with their school community, schools should highlight their Digital Learning Plan, to outline the approach to the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning in the school, emphasising the importance of the planned, purposeful use of digital technology. The difference between academic



and non-academic use of digital technology, including internet-enabled devices, should be clarified. The development of digital competence, including digital and media literacy, remains of key importance to enable children to reach their potential and participate fully as global citizens in a digital world. The Department of Education and Youth's response to the provision of digital skills and literacy within early childhood and care and school settings is covered by the following:

- The new Primary Curriculum Framework.
- Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027
- STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026
- Digital Learning Framework
- Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood

### **Consultation with the School Community**

Schools are skilled and practiced at engaging with their school community on many issues. They are aware of the benefits of consulting with parents/guardians, pupils, teachers, and non-teaching staff to support the development and implementation of school policies and have structures in place to facilitate such engagement. The implementation of this policy should be supported by schools through their existing consultation mechanisms, which may include:

- information sessions with pupils, parents/guardians and school staff
- discussion with student councils or other similar mechanisms established in schools
- engagement with parents' associations
- workshops and/or focus groups
- questionnaires and surveys
- usual staff meetings between teaching staff, non-teaching staff and school leaders
- use of specific school committees such as the school's student support team or equivalent.



The guide to support the Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free initiative launched by the department in 2023 to enable parents to voluntarily agree to not purchase smartphones for their primary age children may help inform the consultation also. This can be found on [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie).

Since 2024, the department has worked with Dr Maureen Griffin, Forensic Psychologist, to pilot a programme that supports primary schools to engage with their school community to co-create student-family-school specific agreements in relation to online behaviour, for use outside of school hours. This programme is now delivered through three Education Centres, and it is hoped to expand the programme in future years, including developing resources for other school communities to draw from. Further information can be found on the Clare [Education Centre website](#).

**The topics for consideration during the consultation should include:**

- Consideration should be given to whether a specific mechanism is needed to implement the ban such as requiring a phone which is taken to school to be stored in a cubby, cubbies or collected by the school. Consideration should be given to administration and practicality. Some examples of existing practices are outlined further below.
- how to manage and apply exemptions to the ban in cases of identified and agreed need, including consideration of how to administer such exceptions (for example, an application procedure, assessment and appeal mechanism, and facilitation of accommodations for individual pupils in a school). Some scenarios that may need to be considered are outlined below. Schools should consider the reasonable accommodations that can be made and may have existing precedent. Any such exemptions should be based on fair and transparent grounds.
- the approach to be taken to extra-curricular activities/activities taking place outside of school, but organised and overseen by the school. The intention of the ban is that it will apply throughout the school day. Some flexibility may however be required when there are school activities taking place off school grounds. This should only be considered and applied to the extent that it is needed for purposes that may include safeguarding and other determined reasons, for example, to facilitate collection by parents/guardians where arrangements change, or a pupil must leave unexpectedly.



## Relevant School Policies

The school should review, and if necessary update, relevant existing school policies and procedures, which may include:

- **Acceptable Usage Policy** – this details acceptable use of Internet enabled devices, and related devices in the school. This policy must be agreed and signed by pupils and their parents/guardians. Advice is available on [Webwise](#).
- **Bí Cineálta Policy** – this is the school’s policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour. The **Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2024** require schools to develop and implement a **Bí Cineálta** policy that sets out how the school community prevents and addresses bullying behaviour. This policy should include strategies specifically aimed at preventing online bullying behaviour, homophobic and transphobic bullying behaviour, racist bullying behaviour, sexist bullying behaviour and sexual harassment, as appropriate.
- **Data Protection Policy** – this policy should be reviewed and updated as necessary, [www.dataprotectionschools.ie](http://www.dataprotectionschools.ie) is an information resource for schools to support the ongoing development of data protection policies
- **Code of Behaviour** – this code and related policies should be reviewed and updated to take account of the ban on the use of personal mobile phones in schools unless as expressly provided for via an agreed exemption, or as instructed by a teacher/appropriate member of school staff. The policy should address school procedures where pupils do not adhere to the ban.
- **Child Protection Policies and procedures, including management of exemptions.**
- **Wellbeing** – The school’s wellbeing policy should be reviewed to ensure the area of safe and ethical use of the internet is addressed in the context of the whole-school approach to wellbeing.



Schools should take the opportunity during the consultation processes to inform pupils, parents/guardians and school staff on the broader issue of online safety and the resources provided by the department, and further information is provided below to enable this.

### **Mechanisms to implement the policy**

While schools already have measures in place to ban the personal use of mobile phones, schools should now have a consistent approach to ensure a ban is implemented for the duration of the school day. Ownership of mobile phones among pupils tends to be low in primary schools, so it may be that a particular mechanism to implement the ban applies in sixth and or fifth class only. In that context, the method chosen to determine and agree the practical arrangements to implement the approach is a decision for each school.

Examples that are used across the system include:

- handed in to school office on arrival to school
- kept in cubbies in classrooms/other areas

### **Possible exemptions that may apply**

Schools are advised to adopt a compassionate and common-sense approach, that is fair and transparent in application, in determining exemptions to the ban.

Exemptions should only apply for medical, wellbeing or specific practical reasons, or for reasons related to pupils' special educational needs. The exemptions should allow pupils to access their phones for the specific reason outlined in the exemption, and not for general use.

**The examples below are not exhaustive and consideration will be needed on a case-by-case basis.**

Examples of some of the possible issues where exemptions are justified may include but are not limited to:

- Diabetes blood glucose monitor and/or insulin delivery mechanism.
- Blood pressure monitoring.



- Seizure conditions where monitoring via a mobile phone app is needed.
- Mental health conditions, where communication with parents/guardians on an unrestricted basis is needed.
- Additional/special educational needs, for specific tasks relating to a student's visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech and language impairments.
- Access by an English as a Second Language (EAL) pupil to specific applications to support language.

### Further supports and resources.

#### Webwise Ireland's Safer Internet Awareness Centre

- Webwise is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre, which provides free information, resources for schools, families and young people on online safety and digital citizenship.
- Webwise develops and disseminates free resources that help teachers integrate digital citizenship and online safety into teaching and learning in their schools. Webwise also provides information, advice, and tools to parents to support their engagement in their children's online lives. With the help of the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel, Webwise creates youth-oriented awareness raising resources and training programmes that promote digital citizenship and address topics such as online wellbeing and cyberbullying.
- Webwise is funded by the Department of Education and Youth and co-funded through the European Commission and is part of the Irish Safer Internet Centre. The Irish Safer Internet Centre is a partnership of four leading organisations – Webwise, Hotline.ie, Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) and the National Parents Council - with a mission to make the Internet a better place for children and young people under the coordination of the Department of Justice.

Oide (Teacher Education Support Service)



- Oide has a dedicated Health and Wellbeing team that supports teachers and schools, through the SPHE curriculum, to develop and promote the personal development, health, and wellbeing of the student; to create a positive school environment and culture; and to prevent and address bullying behaviour, including online bullying and harassment.
- Oide's dedicated Technology in Education area (including professional learning teams of seconded teachers for primary and post-primary sectors) design, develop and deliver a comprehensive range of teacher professional learning programmes to support the embedding of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment. This includes enhancing the competence development of teachers and school leaders to ensure a digitally competent and confident education system, which will in turn foster the development of digital competence, knowledge and understanding in our students as provided for in the curriculum.

The National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) has developed a range of wellbeing information and supports for schools, students and parents/guardians which are available on [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie).

A catalogue of resources provides a non-exhaustive list of documents and resources that are provided by the Department of Education and Youth, its agencies, support services, other government departments and their agencies and by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to assist the promotion of wellbeing across school communities are available on [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie).

Information on Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying, the Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2024 and the Resources to support implementation of a school's Bí Cineálta Policy are available on [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie).

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ENDS.