

Mobile phone policy

Witham Oaks Academy



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1. Introduction and aims

At Witham Oaks Academy our policy aims to:

- Ensure our environment is mobile phone-free by default
- Ensure the safe, responsible and lawful use of mobile phones, where applicable
- Provide clear guidelines for the use of mobile phones for pupils, staff, parents/carers, visitors and volunteers
- Support the school's other policies, especially those related to child protection and behaviour

This policy also aims to address some of the challenges posed by mobile phones in school, such as:

- Risks to child protection
- Data protection issues
- Risk of theft, loss, or damage
- Appropriate use of technology for learning purposes

Note: throughout this policy, 'mobile phones' refers to mobile phones and similar devices.

2. Relevant guidance

This policy meets the requirements of section 36 of the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026](#), and the Department for Education (DfE)'s [mobile phone guidance](#) and [behaviour guidance](#). Further guidance that should be considered alongside this policy is [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#).

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Staff

All staff (including teachers, support staff and supply staff) are required to actively enforce this policy and challenge any breach of mobile phone restrictions immediately and consistently.

Volunteers, or anyone else otherwise engaged by the school, must alert a member of staff if they witness, or are aware of, a breach of this policy.

The Co-Headteacher's are responsible for monitoring the policy and reviewing it annually, and holding staff and pupils accountable for its implementation.

Staff will address any questions or concerns from parents/carers quickly and clearly communicate the reasons for prohibiting the use of mobile phones.

4. Use of mobile phones by staff

The DfE's mobile phone guidance says that staff should not use their own mobile phone for personal reasons in front of pupils throughout the school day. All schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default: anything other than this should be by exception only.

4.1 Personal mobile phones

Staff (including volunteers, contractors and anyone else otherwise engaged by the school) are not permitted to use their personal mobile phone during the school day, throughout the school day.

Use of personal mobile phones must be restricted to non-contact time, and to areas of the school where pupils are not present (such as the staffroom).

There may be circumstances in which it's appropriate for a member of staff to have use of their phone during contact time for personal reasons. For instance (this list is non-exhaustive):

- In the case of acutely ill dependents or family members
- Awaiting for a call from a medical professional eg doctor

The headteacher will decide on a case-by-basis whether to allow for special arrangements.

If special arrangements are not deemed necessary, school staff can use the school office number 01376 513322 as a point of emergency contact.

4.2 Data protection

Staff must not use their personal mobile phones to process personal data, or any other confidential school information, including entering such data into generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as chatbots (e.g. ChatGPT and Google Gemini).

4.3 Safeguarding

Staff must not give their personal contact details to parents/carers or pupils, including connecting through social media and messaging apps.

Staff must avoid publicising their contact details on any social media platform or website, to avoid unwanted contact by parents/carers or pupils.

Staff must not use their personal mobile phones to take photographs or recordings of pupils, their work, or anything else that could identify a pupil. If it's necessary to take photos or recordings as part of a lesson / school trip / activity, this must be done using school equipment.

4.4 Using personal mobiles for work purposes

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for staff to use personal mobile phones or a similar device during the school day in front of pupils for work. Such circumstances may include, but are not limited to:

- Use of multi-factor authentication
- Emergency evacuations
- Supervising off-site trips
- Supervising residential visits

In these circumstances, staff will:

- Use their mobile phones in an appropriate and professional manner, in line with our staff code of conduct
- Not use their phones to take photographs or recordings of pupils, their work, or anything else that could identify a pupil
- Refrain from using their phones to contact parents/carers. If necessary, contact must be made via the school office

4.5 The use of mobile phones on school trips

Carrying mobile phones on trips can help to ensure safety for all members of the school party. However, it is important that the following guidance is adhered to in order to keep children safe and protect staff and volunteers from accusations of inappropriate use:

Members of staff and volunteers may carry their own, personal mobile phones within the following guidelines:

- Personal phones should only be used to contact staff members or volunteers on the trip or emergency services. If possible, these calls should be made away from children.
- Personal phones should not be used for any purpose other than school business for the duration of a trip. This means that personal calls or texts should not be made or accepted. On residential trips this will apply while the member of staff or volunteer is on duty.
- If it becomes necessary for a member of staff or volunteer to make a personal call or text, then the visit leader or another member of staff should be informed and take responsibility for the pupils in the group while the call or text is made away from sight and sound of any pupils.
- Personal mobile phones must not be used under any circumstances to take photographs or videos of pupils. Volunteers are acting role models for the duration of the trip and therefore must not take photos or videos of any pupils, including their own child, using a mobile phone or any other mobile device, e.g. camera or tablet, without the express permission of the visit leader. Volunteers may be asked to take photographs of their group using a school device – this must be passed back to the visit leader at the end of the trip.
- The visit leader may ask volunteers to provide them with their mobile phone number for the duration of the trip so that they can be contacted in case of emergency. The visit leader undertakes to ensure that these numbers are not held on any mobile device or in any written form after the end of the trip.
- It is advised that if the visit leader is using his or her own mobile phone, then if they need to contact anyone during the trip they do so by pre-dialling 141 (some mobile providers use a different prefix – staff are advised to check this with their provider) before the number so that their own number remains protected.

4.6 Sanctions

Staff that fail to adhere to this policy may face disciplinary action.

See the school's staff disciplinary policy for more information.

5. Use of mobile phones by pupils

At Witham Oaks Academy pupils must not use mobile phones during the school day, including during lessons, between lessons, at breaktimes or at lunchtimes.

Pupils are strongly discouraged from bringing mobile phones onto the school premises as they are valuable items that may be lost, damaged or stolen. However, the school recognises that for some pupils in years 5 and 6, a mobile phone may support their personal safety when travelling independently to and from school. Parents/carers wishing their child to bring a mobile phone to school must complete the school's Mobile Phone Permission Form.

The school expects pupils in all other year groups to be collected by an adult or responsible person. Where a pupil needs to contact their parent/carer during the school day, they may use a school telephone. Similarly, parents/carers who need to contact their child urgently should contact the school office, and a message will be relayed promptly.

Where a pupil has permission to bring a mobile phone to school:

- The phone must be switched off on arrival at school.
- The phone must be placed in the mobile phone box at the front school gate or office (if the child is late) on arrival.
- Phones will be stored securely in the designated school phone box and can be collected from the school office at the end of the school day.
- Phones must not be carried by pupils or left in bags, coats, trays or other personal belongings during the school day.
- Pupils must not access or use mobile phones for calls, texts, messaging, browsing, photography, filming, recording, gaming or any other purpose during the school day.
- The same expectations apply during off-site school activities, including educational visits, swimming and sporting activities.
- Mobile phones must not be taken on school excursions
- The school accepts no responsibility for the loss, theft or damage of a mobile phone brought onto the school premises.

Pupils will be taught the risks that are associated with the use of mobile phones, both in school and more broadly, to ensure they understand the decision to prohibit the use of mobile phones throughout the school day. These risks can include a loss of focus in lessons, classroom disruption and an increase in bullying. Pupils will be encouraged to see a mobile-phone free environment as desirable and valuable.

5.1 Use of smartwatches by pupils

The DfE's statutory [mobile phones guidance](#) includes in the term 'mobile phones' all devices with communications and smart technology that the school chooses to include in their policy.

Smartwatches are wristwatches with smart technology in them. They can be used to tell the time, send and receive text and voice messages, make calls and listen to music. Some smartwatches have wellness and health-related features.

Smartwatches are not permitted on the school premises. Pupils must not bring smartwatches to school, regardless of whether their communication or other smart functions have been disabled. This is because smartwatches can be used to send and receive messages, make calls, access apps and other functions that are inconsistent with the school's mobile-phone-free approach.

Any smartwatch brought to school will be required to be placed in the mobile phone box at the front gate and stored securely in the school office until the end of the school day. Any specific medical requirement for a smartwatch will be considered separately and managed through the pupil's individual healthcare arrangements.

5.2 Exceptions for medical circumstances

The school may permit pupils to use a mobile phone in school, due to exceptional circumstances.

The school recognises that some pupils may require access to mobile technology as part of an identified medical need. This may include pupils with diabetes who use a continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) system that connects to a smartphone or other smart device to monitor blood glucose levels.

In such circumstances, access to a mobile phone or smart device will be permitted only where it forms part of the pupil's agreed medical arrangements and has been discussed with the parent/carer and school. The device will be used solely for the purpose of supporting the pupil's medical needs and will not be treated as general access to a mobile phone.

For pupils using a mobile device to support diabetes management:

- The device must be used only for the agreed medical purpose, such as receiving or monitoring CGM readings.
- The pupil must not use the device for calls, messaging, social media, gaming, browsing, photography, recording or any other non-medical purpose during the school day.
- The device should remain accessible in the manner required by the pupil's individual medical arrangements.
- Relevant staff will be made aware of the agreed arrangements and will support the pupil in accessing the device where necessary.
- The school will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made where required to enable pupils with medical needs to safely manage their condition in school.
- Where appropriate, the arrangements will be documented within the pupil's individual healthcare plan/medical plan and reviewed with parents/carers and relevant healthcare professionals.

In the case of permission due to exceptional circumstances, permission will only be granted where there is a documented safeguarding or medical necessity. To request such permission, pupils or parents/carers should contact Co-Headteachers.

5.3 Sanctions

Any mobile phones discovered to have been brought into the school and not stored in the designated phone box or handed in to the office will be confiscated immediately. Parents or carers will be asked to collect the mobile phone from the school office.

Any breach of this policy will be investigated and managed in accordance with the school's Behaviour and Relationships Policy and Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. School leaders will exercise professional judgement when determining an appropriate response, taking into account the nature of the incident, the age of the pupil, any previous concerns and the need to safeguard children.

Where appropriate, the school may withdraw or restrict a pupil's permission to bring a mobile phone or other electronic device onto the school site, either temporarily or permanently, as a consequence of inappropriate use.

Parents/carers will be informed at the earliest appropriate opportunity where there has been a serious or repeated breach of this policy, or where the incident raises safeguarding concerns.

Electronic devices, including mobile phones, smart watches, tablets and other digital devices, can contain files or data which relate to a criminal offence, pose a risk of harm to another person, or form part of an ongoing safeguarding concern. This includes, but is not limited to:

- indecent images of children;
- pornography;
- abusive, threatening or discriminatory messages;
- images or videos used to bully, harass or humiliate others;
- evidence relating to suspected criminal behaviour;
- evidence of child-on-child abuse, exploitation, coercion or online abuse;
- communications which indicate a pupil may be at risk of significant harm, criminal exploitation or sexual exploitation; or
- any material that may compromise the safety and wellbeing of pupils, staff or others.

In accordance with the [Department for Education's Searching, Screening and Confiscation guidance \(July 2022\)](#), where a member of staff has a good reason to suspect that data or files stored on an electronic device have been, or could be, used to:

- cause harm to another person;
- undermine the safe environment of the school;
- disrupt teaching and learning;
- commit or facilitate a criminal offence.

an authorised member of staff may examine the data or files on the device where it is lawful, necessary and proportionate to do so.

Furthermore, this also applies where a member of staff has good reason to suspect that data or files stored on an electronic device are relevant to an ongoing safeguarding concern, including where the contents of the device may assist in assessing, managing or reducing the risk of harm to a child or another person.

Any search of an electronic device will be undertaken only by authorised staff, with due regard to the privacy and dignity of those involved, and only where there is a legitimate behaviour, welfare or safeguarding concern. The school will follow the statutory guidance contained within the Department for Education's Searching, Screening and Confiscation guidance (July 2022).

This approach reflects the school's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children while ensuring that any examination of an electronic device is lawful, necessary, proportionate and undertaken in accordance with statutory guidance. It also recognises that information stored on an electronic device may be a significant source of evidence in identifying, assessing or responding to ongoing safeguarding concerns and protecting children from harm.

In each case, the sanction given will be reasonable and proportionate. The school will also consider whether:

- There are any relevant special circumstances (for example, age, religious requirements, special educational needs (SEN), disability)
- The pupil's behaviour may indicate they may be suffering, or at risk of, harm. If this is suspected, staff will follow the appropriate procedure set out in [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#). This will include speaking with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or deputy, who will consider if pastoral support, an early intervention, or a referral to children's social care, is appropriate

Certain types of conduct, bullying or harassment can be classified as criminal conduct. The school takes such conduct extremely seriously and will involve the police or other agencies as appropriate.

Such conduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Making of or sharing nudes and semi-nudes including images that are digitally altered or wholly generated using AI (such as 'deepfakes' or 'deep nudes')
- Upskirting
- Threats of violence or assault
- Abusive calls, emails, social media posts or texts directed at someone on the basis of someone's ethnicity, religious beliefs or sexual orientation

6. Use of mobile phones by parents/carers, volunteers and visitors

Parents are encouraged to reinforce and discuss this policy at home as appropriate, including the risks associated with mobile phone use and the benefits of a mobile phone-free environment.

Parents/carers, visitors and volunteers (including governors and contractors) must adhere to this policy as it relates to staff if they are on the school site during the school day.

This means:

- Not taking pictures or recordings of pupils, unless it's at a public event (such as a school fair), or of their own child
- Using any photographs or recordings for personal use only, and not posting on social media without consent
- Not using phones in lessons, when working with pupils or while children are present
- Visitors and supply staff are not allowed to use mobile phones on the school premises and phones must be kept in their bags. Mobile phones can be used in the staff room
- If a visitor, parent or carer is seen using their mobile phone, they will be asked politely to turn it off/desist from using it/remove it from children's view

Parents/carers, visitors and volunteers will be informed of the rules for mobile phone use when they sign in at reception or attend a public event at school.

It is recognised that many parents and carers use their mobile phone as a camera/video device to record their child at special performances e.g. class assemblies, concerts, etc. On these occasions the use of a phone is permitted for photographing/videoing only; images should only be taken by parents and carers if they include their own child and that the use of these images is for their own personal use and must not be uploaded for any internet use including Facebook or any other social networking sites or used in any form of publication unless they are solely of their own child.

The school recognise that children may inadvertently be included in photographs by another parent; the school, therefore, are obliged to warn parents and carers of the legal and safeguarding risks of publishing such photographs on any platform. The placing of any photographs of children on social media is dangerous and parents may be in breach of the Data Protection Act if they upload photos of other children without the explicit consent of that child's parents.

Parents/carers or volunteers supervising school trips or residential visits must not:

- Use their phone to make contact with other parents/carers
- Take photos or recordings of pupils, their work, or anything else that could identify a pupil

Parents/carers or volunteers supervising trips are also responsible for enforcing the school's policy for pupils using their phones, as set out in section 5 above, but must refer any sanctions to a member of staff, as they do not have the power to search or confiscate devices.

Parents/carers must use the school office as the first point of contact if they need to get in touch with their child during the school day. They must not try to contact their child on their personal mobile during the school day.

7. Loss, theft or damage

Pupils bringing a mobile phone to school must ensure that the device is clearly labelled with their name and is switched off before being handed to a member of staff on arrival. Phones will be stored securely in the mobile phone box, and returned to pupils from the school office at the end of the school day.

Pupils should protect their phones using an appropriate password, PIN or other security measure to prevent unauthorised access to the device.

The school accepts no responsibility for mobile phones that are lost, damaged or stolen while being brought to or from school, on school premises. This disclaimer will be communicated to parents/carers through the Mobile Phone Permission Form and this policy.

Where a mobile phone is confiscated because it has been used contrary to this policy, it will be stored securely in school office until it can be collected by the parent/carer.

Staff must also ensure that personal and school-issued mobile phones are appropriately secured and protected by a password, PIN or other security measure. Staff must follow the school's acceptable use and data protection requirements to reduce the risk of unauthorised access or data breaches.

Lost phones should be returned to Witham Oaks Academy, Spa Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 1NA. The school will then attempt to contact the owner.

8. Monitoring and review

The school is committed to ensuring that this policy has a positive impact on pupils' education, behaviour and welfare. When reviewing the policy, the school will take into account:

- Feedback from parents/carers and pupils
- Feedback from staff
- Records of behaviour and safeguarding incidents
- Relevant advice from the Department for Education, the local authority and any other relevant organisations

If there are any concerns regarding this policy, these should be brought to the attention of Co-Headteachers in a timely manner.

Appendix 1: Code of conduct for pupils allowed to bring their phones to school due to exceptional circumstances

Pupil Code of Conduct

You must obey the following rules if you bring your mobile phone to school:

1. The phone must be switched off on arrival at school.
2. The phone must be placed in the mobile phone box at the front school gate or office (if you are late) on arrival.
3. Phones will be stored securely in the designated school phone box and can be collected from the school office at the end of the school day.
4. Phones must not be left in bags, coats, trays or other personal belongings during the school day
5. You must not access or use mobile phones for calls, texts, messaging, browsing, photography, filming, recording, gaming or any other purpose during the school day.
6. The same expectations apply during off-site school activities, including educational visits, swimming and sporting activities.
7. Mobile phones must not be taken on school excursions
8. The school accepts no responsibility for the loss, theft or damage of a mobile phone brought onto the school premises.

Appendix 2: Permission form allowing a pupil to bring their phone to school

- # Mobile Phone Permission Form

- Dear Parent/Carers

Mobile phones are only permitted in school for year 6 children, unless there is a specific occasion whereby a child in year 5/4 is walking to/from school without an adult.

All mobile phones will need to be put in the black box at the school gates before the child goes to class. If they are late it should be handed in at the office. They must be switched off and clearly named.

This box is then brought to the office by a member of staff.

Please complete this permission form if you wish your child to bring a phone to school. We will not accept any phones in school without a completed form.

- **Child's Name and Class**

- **Parental Consent**

I give permission for my child to bring into school a mobile phone. **I am aware the school cannot accept any liability for loss or damage whilst it is on school premises.**

I also understand that permission may be removed by the school if my child breaches the mobile phone policy and does not place their phone in the box that is kept securely in the office.

☐ Yes

☐ No

- ***Witham Oaks Academy fully complies with information legislation. For full details of how we use your personal information go to www.withamoaks.co.uk/privacy-notices or call the School Office if you are unable to access the Internet.***

11. Appendix 3: Template mobile phone information slip for visitors

Use of mobile phones and similar devices in our school

Our school is a mobile phone-free environment.

- Please keep your mobile phone on silent/vibrate while on the school grounds
- Please do not use phones where pupils are present.
- Do not take photos or recordings of pupils (unless it is your own child), or staff
- Do not use your phone in lessons, when working with pupils or while children are present

The school accepts no responsibility for phones that are lost, damaged or stolen while you are on the school grounds.

A full copy of our mobile phone policy is available from the school office.

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- Do not take photos or recordings of pupils (unless it is your own child), or staff
- Do not use your phone in lessons, when working with pupils or while children are present

The school accepts no responsibility for phones that are lost, damaged or stolen while you are on the school grounds.

A full copy of our mobile phone policy is available from the school office.

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- Please keep your mobile phone on silent/vibrate while on the school grounds
- Please do not use phones where pupils are present.
- Do not take photos or recordings of pupils (unless it is your own child), or staff
- Do not use your phone in lessons, when working with pupils or while children are present

The school accepts no responsibility for phones that are lost, damaged or stolen while you are on the school grounds.

A full copy of our mobile phone policy is available from the school office.

Appendix 4: Use of mobile phones - guidance for volunteers on school trips

Thank you for volunteering to help on our trip. During the trip we ask that you follow the guidelines below in accordance with the school's mobile phone policy:

- Personal phones should only be used to contact staff members or volunteers on the trip or emergency services. If possible, these calls should be made away from pupils.
- Personal phones must not be used for any purpose other than school business for the duration of a day trip. On residential trips this will apply while the member of staff or volunteer is on duty. This means that personal calls or texts must not be made or accepted.
- If it becomes necessary for a member of staff or volunteer to make a personal call, then the visit leader or another member of staff should be informed and take responsibility for the pupils in the group while the call or text is made away from sight and sound of any pupils.
- Personal mobile phones must not be used under any circumstance to take photographs or videos of pupils. Volunteers are asked to set an example for the duration of the trip and therefore must not take photos or videos of any pupils, including their own child, using a mobile phone or any other mobile device, e.g. cameras or iPads, without the express permission of the visit leader. Volunteers may be asked to take photographs of their group using a school device – this must be passed back to the visit leader at the end of the trip.
- The visit leader may ask volunteers to provide them with their mobile phone number for the duration of the trip so that they can be contacted in case of emergency. The visit leader undertakes to ensure that these numbers are not held on any mobile device or in any written form after the end of the trip.
- It is advised that if the visit leader is using her or his own mobile phone, then if they need to contact anyone during the trip they do so by pre-dialling 141 (some mobile providers use a different prefix – volunteers are advised to check this with their provider) before the number so that their own number remains protected.
- If you have any questions regarding these guidelines please speak to the visit leader.

Thank you for your support and co-operation to ensure the safety of all the pupils.