



Abbey Gate College

| POLICY: Smart Technology [CONSULTATION FINAL] | |
|---|----------------|
| Scope | Whole College |
| Responsibility | Head |
| Review & Update | July 2025 |
| Governor Approval | Vanessa Brodie |

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Policy Statement (1)

This policy aims to establish an appropriate balance for all students, in relation to habits, usage, and expectations around ever-evolving smart technology, both in school and at home. It has been written in consultation with parents, staff, and students in our Abbey Gate College community.

Smart technology is understood to include, but may not be limited to: multifunctional mobile/smart phones, smartwatches, smart devices. Smart technology enables access to the internet for the user, including social media.

Basic phones, as referenced, are understood to be limited to core, simple communication functions, such as voice-calls, SMS messaging, and maybe with a camera. Basic phones have no access to the internet or social media.

All such items, if brought on to site, are considered as pupils' personal property, in accordance with the College's parental contract.

The College acknowledges that the implementation of this policy in its desirable fullness will take time and is adopting a staggered approach. Some behaviours and habits that prevail in our present-day society will take conscious and deliberate action to undo; however, the College aims to influence correction to and re-setting of some of those identified behaviours and habits, for the life-long benefit of our pupils of all ages, as they move through our College.

Policy Statement (2)

- 1) This policy applies to all members of the Abbey Gate College community, including those in our EYFS setting.
- 2) Abbey Gate College implements this policy through adherence to the procedures set out in the rest of this document.
- 3) This policy is made available to all interested parties in accordance with our *Provision of Information* policy. It should be read in conjunction with our *Academic Integrity (ref. use and mis-use of AI)*, *Acceptable Use, Behaviour, HR/Employment (for staff)*, *Online Safety, Safeguarding and Wellbeing & Mental Health* policies.
- 4) The College is fully committed to ensuring that the application of this policy is non-discriminatory in line with the UK Equality Act (2010). Further details are available in the College's *EDI* policy document.
- 5) This policy is reviewed at least annually, or as events or legislation changes require, by the College Leadership Team and the Governing Body. The deadline for the next review is no later than 12 months after the most recent review date indicated above.
- 6) The most recent updates were made for the introduction of the policy.

Key Personnel

- 1) Craig Jenkinson: Head
- 2) Marie Hickey: Head of Infant & Junior School
- 3) Carole Houghton: Deputy Head (Pastoral) & DSL
- 4) Mike Booth: Deputy Head (Academic)
- 5) Vanessa Brodie: Chair of Governors' Wellbeing sub-committee

Evidential Basis

Key research and reading, which, among others and complementary to increasing governmental legislation around the world, explain the requirement for a managed approach in relation to smart technology, can be found in:

- 1) DfE “Mobile Phones in Schools” Guidance, February 2024
- 2) Jonathan Haidt, “The Anxious Generation” (plus related podcasts and media postings)
- 3) Johann Hari, “Stolen Focus”
- 4) Parent Pact (smartphonefreechildhood)

Additionally, the College holds copyright notes from Dr Aric Sigman’s presentation to parents and students in October 2024: “Managing Screen Time”.

Community Approach & Context

The College seeks the support of as many parents as possible in managing young people’s access to and use of smartphones or other smart technology, in order to delay the potential, detrimental neurological and psychological impact of arguably premature exposure to online algorithms, and the associated or additional risks of addictive, distracted, unhealthy, and harmful behaviours.

The College also seeks the support of parents in being aware of their own use of smart technology and to what extent their own behaviours role-model habits for their children.

Specifically, the College reminds parents that if they wish to contact their child, while under College supervision, they must telephone or email the respective school site or, for trips and visits, ring or message the contact number provided.

The College has a clear mission and aims, with a “triple wellbeing” approach to learning and personal development of “Self, Service, Sustainability”. Our strong co-curricular programme, community ethos, and partnership work with local organisations ensure meaningful life purpose and relational connectivity for all students. Each student’s engagement with these three Pillars of Purpose is actively monitored each term by form tutors/class teachers, and Senior School students are required to commit to weekly co-curricular activities. Form tutor reports provide specific feedback to parents about this aspect of their child’s development and learning.

This is further enhanced by the College’s curricular schemes in relation to digital behaviours and online safety, which are regularly shared with parents, to support a unified and appropriately informed approach.

“Phone-free” notices (ref. Appendix 2) throughout the College are displayed, for example, in corridors, classrooms, and toilets. Clocks are in all classrooms and main areas of College, in order to support a shift in default habits for time-checking. Table-top games are also available in form group bases, for informal and recreational use by students, if inside at break or lunchtime. Where possible, however, students are encouraged to be outside and benefitting from the College’s naturally beautiful and rural setting.

Recommendations

- 1) The College firmly recommends that the purchase of a multi-functional smartphone for a young person should not be before their 14th birthday, and ideally could be later.
- 2) The College also firmly recommends that social media applications and similar should only be permitted from a young person's 16th birthday.
- 3) The College further recommends that, if parents wish a younger child to have some form of mobile connectivity, they purchase a basic phone for voice-calls and text messaging, without internet access. Through such a reasonable consensus of community-wide behaviours, habits, and expectations, children in their primary and early secondary years may also be spared the potentially harmful "fear of missing out".
- 4) The College does, however, recognise that specific educational, emotional, or health needs may benefit from a smart device at a younger age and, in conjunction with parents and medical advice, will fully support any reasonable adjustments as may be required.
- 5) The College recommends that students from Year 7 have their own digital device/surface/laptop for learning, purchased through the College's suggested company of 'Easy4U'.
 - a. Each one is pre-loaded only with approved educational applications, resources, and tools, as well as pre-programmed restrictions on any further downloads.
 - b. Each device also comes with a comprehensive insurance and repair package.
 - c. This approach supports an overt separation of a device that is used exclusively for positive learning experiences in an increasingly digital world; compared with any device that may be used for social activities, which would be kept at home under parental supervision and authorisation.
 - d. Other digital devices/surfaces/laptops are permitted on site for learning; however, all responsibilities for the software, security, repair, and maintenance are parental, and all use on site must adhere to College policies and procedures, and be solely for educational purposes.

College Rules & Expectations in Relation to Smart Technology

- 1) Smartphones and similar will not be permitted, as a general rule, to be brought onto our College sites for all students, unless in our Sixth Form.
- 2) Basic phones will be permitted to be brought onto our College sites, if a family considers that their child needs this for out-of-hours communication.
- 3) While this policy is implemented and habits change, the College will permit in 2025-26 for students in Years 9, 10, and 11, to bring a smartphone onto site, if they already have one. These permissions will reduce with subsequent years. Therefore, by 2028-29, it is intended that rules '1' and '2' will then fully apply to all students up to Year 11.
- 4) The College will, however, continue to be "phone-free", explicitly, from when all students arrive on site until the end of formal instruction at 15.50. This means that "phones must be switched off and put away, at all times during the school day".
- 5) Senior School students in After-School-Study or other co-curricular activities after 15.50 will be permitted to send essential, time-and-place-for-collection messages while on site; however, the default ethos will remain "phone-free" and any usage will be both discreet and minimal.

- 6) Junior School pupils, if they bring a phone to school, are required to hand them in at Reception on arrival, and collect them at the end of the day.
- 7) Senior School students, if they bring a phone to school, will maintain liability for their safe-keeping. This is likely to be in a protected part of their school bag or in a personal locker, which can be requested from school.
- 8) The College will, therefore, not encourage or expect ownership or usage of a smartphone for any educational purposes, in or outside of College, including peripatetic lessons.
- 9) Day and residential trips for students up to and including Year 11 will, equally, have no requirement or expectation for student ownership or usage of a smartphone, or similar. Individual trips will confirm, for students of all ages, explicit permissions and prohibitions in relation to communication and personal phones beforehand. Essential communication and promotional photography will be managed by the trip leader, and, if applicable, personal cameras may be permitted.
- 10) Sixth Form students may use a smartphone, if they have one, in the Sixth Form area only.
- 11) Staff usage of personal devices is, similarly, usually limited to staff, professional areas and, by default, discreet at all times.
- 12) Internet connectivity for all digital devices, without exception, must be through the College's Wi-Fi at all times, in accordance with existing policy. Use of 3G, 4G, 5G or VPNs are explicitly prohibited for all students at all times on site, in accordance with the College's safeguarding and acceptable use policies.
- 13) When pupils study at home, the College advises all parents to manage and monitor home settings in relation to Wi-Fi and other ways to connect to internet; such that any child's access at home is as desired and age-appropriate.
- 14) The study default for pupils across the College is paper-based, with exercise books or file-paper in all applicable subject areas. An individual pupil's use of a digital device in lessons for completion of written work will be in accordance with respective SEND requirements.
- 15) The College commits to an overall expectation that in each subject area – except where a digital device is unavoidably the sole tool in the lesson – individual screen and keyboard usage and activities will be the minority, with the majority of learning experiences including, but not limited to:
 - a. Teacher presentation
 - b. Whole class discussion
 - c. Individual discussion
 - d. Pair-work
 - e. Group-work
 - f. Hand-written work
 - g. Practical activity
 - h. Outdoor learning

Implementation & Consequences

The College's 'Behaviour Policy' and continuing ethos are intentionally not sanction-driven or confrontational, where possible.

The College accepts that any specific rule or intervention in relation to smart technology and personal phones – including, as some schools do, the managed keeping of individuals' phones in pouches or lockers – can be disrespected or broken; given that each student cannot be and should not be under 100% supervision throughout the school day.

The College commits to a belief that pupils' personal development towards adulthood must include appropriate responsibility, trust, and integrity.

The College will continue to review related rules and sanctions, going forward.

- 1) If a student, except Sixth Form in the Sixth Form area, is seen with a personal mobile phone, it is confiscated immediately for the remainder of the school day, for collection by the student at the end of the day from Reception. A sanction record is kept centrally on the College's systems. This is monitored by staff and available to parents.
- 2) If there are repeated concerns for any individual student they will be discussed with home and enhanced sanctions will be imposed by the school, as they would for any other, deliberate breach of the Code of Conduct. This may include, as an example, confiscation for a longer period or until collection by the student's parent.

APPENDIX 1: Parental & Staff Consultation Questions & Answers

- 1) According to pupil passports, students are able to take photos of the board or work with their phone, in order to consolidate their learning. This is something that happens on a regular basis, particularly when hard copies of notes may be unavailable.
 - *Often, teacher resources are already digital and are made available to students anyway through shared, digital platforms.*
 - *On occasions where a snapshot of a moment would be helpful for a student, this could be done with their own classroom device/laptop; there are alternative and more appropriate means to take such images, without using a smartphone.*
- 2) If a child already has a smartphone, is the expectation that an additional device will need to be purchased?
 - *There is no College requirement for students up to Year 11 to have a personal, mobile phone, whether smart or basic.*
 - *If a student up to and including Year 8 from September 2025 already has a smartphone, then it must be kept at home, for personal use only, with parental permissions, care, and oversight.*
 - *If a student in Years 9, 10, and 11 from September 2025 already has a smartphone, we would prefer and recommend that 'b' applies. However, we acknowledge that a staggered implementation of this policy may be more realistic for some students and families; hence, a student may have their existing smartphone on site for use outside of the school day, in accordance with our "Phone-free" expectations.*
 - *In general, we do understand that some form of mobile connectivity may be helpful, practical, or reassuring for some students, in relation to bus travel and pick-up times. A basic phone fully enables this, and current costs are very low, around £30.*
- 3) Sporting fixtures, both inside the school day and outside are put up on paper for the children to see, then they take a photo of it so they know their kit requirements and also if they need a late pick-up or early drop-off. How would this work?
 - *Similar to question 1, staff will share information digitally wherever and whenever possible, to avoid any need for in-the-moment photos.*
 - *If this is absolutely necessary, alternative devices/laptops can be used, or a pen and paper personal note taken of what matters.*
- 4) If my child is returning from an away fixture and there is a delay for pick-up, how can parents be informed?
 - *If students are due to return before 5.00pm, our Reception staff will help with any communications between College and home.*
 - *If students have their own basic phone, as in question 2, this will enable such communication directly with home.*
 - *Each away fixture will also have access to a College phone and, as long as students know their home contact number, they will be able to borrow this during the journey to message home.*

- 5) Will my child be allowed a smartphone on trips?
- *Each trip will clarify expectations or recommendations in relation to what students may bring or use; however, our default position is that trips are device-free, and that students can engage directly with each other, their teachers, and the world around them.*
 - *As in the main body of the policy, there may be individual arrangements by mutual agreement between College and home, especially where the arguable need for a mobile phone may be supported by specific educational, emotional, or health requirements and has limited or no internet access or Apps.*
 - *If a key issue is taking photographs, these will be done by staff, mindful of professional responsibilities and safeguarding requirements. Respective trips and visits may permit a separate camera, if appropriate.*
 - *If a key issue is communication with home, again, this will be managed by staff, as is usually the case anyway. Where feasible and possible, staff will, as a minimum, aim to inform parents about a trip's safe arrival and return journey. A basic phone may be permitted on certain trips, if considered appropriate; however, the College assumes a limited or exceptional need for this.*
 - *If a key issue is entertainment, we would encourage students to engage in the large variety of alternatives, which do not require a smartphone.*
- 6) My child has medical needs and there are specific Apps on their smartphone, which they require as part of their continuing care.
- *We completely understand this and, in such instances, common sense exceptions and permissions will be supported, as above.*
- 7) Would a summary of key points be helpful?
- *Thank you – this has now been done (Appendix 3)*

APPENDIX 2: Phone-Free Notice



Personal Excellence



WE ARE A
PHONE-FREE
SCHOOL



Phones must be switched off and put away,
at all times during the school day

Learning with Courage and Compassion

SELF



SERVICE



SUSTAINABILITY

APPENDIX 3: Summary of Key Points

- 1) This policy is a response to shared, significant concerns by Abbey Gate College parents and staff about the impact of smartphones and access to social media and the internet, for young people.
- 2) It is informed by the growing body of neuroscientific and psychological research and findings from across the world.
- 3) It aims and intends only to benefit the wellbeing of our children.
- 4) This policy has been written over several months, jointly with parents, and in open consultation with our entire Abbey Gate College community.
- 5) From September 2025, smartphones will not be permitted on our College sites for all students, except Sixth Form. The full implementation of this will take effect from September 2028, with a staggered introduction for Years 9, 10, and 11 from September 2025.
- 6) The College recommends that smartphones with social media and internet connectivity be considered for a young person, only after their 16th birthday.
- 7) The College seeks the support of all families in this, so that our children are spared additional “fear of missing out”.
- 8) The College suggests the purchase of a basic phone, if a family wishes their child to have some form of connectivity for out-of-hours transport or collection practicalities.
- 9) The College will remain “phone-free”.
- 10) Students’ use of screens will be the minority of their learning experience.
- 11) Clear sanctions will be in place for any transgressions.
- 12) The College’s curricular and co-curricular programmes, on the foundation of our three Pillars of Purpose – Self, Service, Sustainability, pro-actively encourage and enable healthy, rounded personal development, within an ethos of personalised care and nurture.