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"Even when smartphones are tucked away in a child's school bag, pocket, or locker, they will continue to occupy a significant proportion of a young person's working memory, leaving it impossible to give their full attention in the classroom."

Between 2012 and 2022, hospital admissions for child mental health concerns have increased by 64%. 514% for eating disorders alone.

With the rise of screen time and social media use in children, there has been a stark increase in low self-esteem, anxiety and depression, behavioural changes (including aggression and violence), inattention and impulsivity and sleep disorders.

There has been a rise in the radicalisation of vulnerable young men, influenced by extremist and misogynistic content, leading to an increase in violence and criminal activity. Young, pliable minds are manipulated on devices which are designed to keep them hooked.

The mere presence of these devices in school impedes on children's attention, safety, security, and freedom to separate from the constraints of the online world, even if just for 8hrs a day.

Mobile phone usage in young people

- It can take up to 20 minutes for pupils to refocus on what they were learning after ... noticing a notification on their phone.
- Children who were exposed to longer than two hours a day of recreational screen time on smart phones and playing video games had worse working memory, processing speed, attention levels, language skills and executive function compared with those who did not.
- Screen time can also be damaging to a child's sleep pattern.

Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing – Report Summary Uk Parliament May 2024



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Why change the current policy?

- We thought this was working well.
- We assumed that there were minimal issues and that, unless a major safeguarding issue occurred, we would retain the 'see it, lose it' approach.
- We were invited to go to Birchwood High School to see this in action.
- We went but with a real scepticism.
- We came back as converts.
- There is a moral need to make this happen.



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Feedback from other schools

Other schools we have visited have found the implementation of phone pouches to be highly beneficial and have reported improvements in the following areas:

- attainment at GCSE
- behaviour in lesson and around the site
- attendance



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Objectives

- Eliminate phone-related disruptions during lessons and social times.
- Improve student engagement and concentration.
- Reduce safeguarding concerns linked to inappropriate phone use.
- Support staff by removing the burden of managing phone-related issues.
- Reduce dependency and enhance focus.
- Improve mental health.



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How does it work?

- Pupils will be given their own signal-blocking pouch to keep in form time after half term
- School gates will open at 8:20am. If pupils need to be on site before then - e.g. revision sessions or breakfast club - they will come in through reception.
- On arrival at school pupils will switch off their phone and place it into the pouch, locking it closed.
- Members of staff on the gate will check this.
- At the end of the day, pupils will unlock their pouch with one of the many magnets around the site. Staff on duty will have portable magnets too.
- Pupil's leaving site during lesson time will leave via reception, as normal, where there will be a magnet to release the pouch.
- Y10 and 11 will be able to open their pouches when leaving site at lunch time, but must lock it again on return.



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What if...

A pupil has a medical need to use their phone? - They will be provided with an adapted pouch that still allows medical use.

Pupils say they have no phone? - They will be scanned with a wand.

Pupils forget their pouch? - They will hand their phone in for the day. Year 10 and 11 will not be able to retrieve these at lunch time, but we will always ensure they can access food.



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Consequences

- Pupils who do not follow the process or access any mobile phone or wireless device during the day will face a serious sanction and their phone will be confiscated.
- Repeated breach of the policy will incur more serious sanctions.



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Any general questions about the policy and its implementation

If you have a specific question relating to your child - please email this to your child's head of college.



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