Villa Real School

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MOBILE PHONE & COMMUNICATIOIN DEVICES POLICY & PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Responsibility: Jill Bowe Review Date: Sept 2026

Date to be reviewed: Sept 2027

Foreword and Introduction

This policy has been created by Helen Hogan: Safeguarding Matters to provide clarity to all stakeholders on the school's expectations and response to the possession and use of mobile phones and communication devices on the school site.

Mobile phones are now embedded in children's daily lives. While they can support safety during travel, they also present significant safeguarding risks including online bullying, exposure to harmful content, exploitation, image-based abuse, and disruption to learning. It is essential to have clear, consistent procedures in place to manage these risks and promote a safe, calm, and focused learning environment. This means operating as a mobile-free environment.

Purpose and Aim

At Villa Real School, the purpose of this policy is to set out clearly the direct actions in place to reduce the risks associated with mobile phones and personal devices on our site by:

Safeguarding Children and Staff: Protecting children from potential risks associated with unsupervised mobile device use at school (such as exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, or unwanted contact) and preventing the use of devices in ways that could infringe on the privacy or welfare of others (for example, unauthorised photography or recording). This aligns with the statutory safeguarding guidance (Keeping Children Safe in Education) and the school's duty of care to its children.

Supporting Academic Focus: Ensuring that children's attention remains on learning and social development during the school day. Mobile phones are a well-documented source of distraction; their presence can lead to loss of focus in lessons and classroom disruption. By prohibiting device use, we maintain an environment where teachers can teach and children can learn without interruption, thereby improving academic engagement and outcomes.

Reducing Distractions & Online Harms: Creating a calm, technology-free space during school hours will reduce digital distractions and stressors. Evidence and current research indicate that removing smartphones from the school setting can decrease instances of bullying and online harassment and improve well-being. This policy helps prevent situations where social media, texting, or games divert attention or contribute to peer conflicts. It also eliminates the temptation for children to engage with potentially harmful online content during the day.

Encouraging Healthy Relationships and Social Skills: Promoting face-to-face interaction, communication skills, and positive relationships among children and between children and staff. By not relying on devices, children are encouraged to engage directly with peers, participate actively in class, and seek support from teachers and support staff when needed. This contributes to a healthier school culture where relationships are built on personal interactions.

Complying with Guidance and Best Practice: Adhering to current national guidance and statutory frameworks in England regarding mobile technology in schools. The DfE expects schools to implement policies prohibiting mobile phone use throughout the day as part of their overall behaviour policy, to ensure high standards of behaviour and a safe environment. This policy follows those expectations and incorporates best practices for managing devices (such as secure storage systems and clear sanctions for misuse). It is also mindful of legal obligations to make exceptions or reasonable adjustments for children with special circumstances (e.g. medical needs) as appropriate.

In summary, this policy's purpose is to balance the benefits of mobile connectivity for safety during travel with the need to safeguard the school environment during the day. By

clarifying when and how mobile phones and similar devices may be possessed or used, this policy helps maintain a secure, productive atmosphere where education and well-being come first.

This policy also outlines the next steps we will take in the event of misuse of mobile phones or devices, taking into account the full context around each incident.
Finally, this policy relates to the possession, storage, and use of mobile phones and communication devices on the school premises or during school-led activities. Where concerns arise about a child's use of a device in the community, this should be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), who will share information with parents, the police, or other agencies as appropriate.

We are committed to the safety and well-being of all children, staff, and parents. We will always take immediate action to reduce the risk of harm to any individual on the school site.

What is a Mobile Phone or Communication Device?
For the purpose of this policy, a "mobile phone or communication device" includes:

- Smartphones
- Basic mobile phones
- Smart watches and wearable technology capable of messaging, recording, or internet access
- Tablets, iPads, handheld gaming devices
- Any device capable of taking photographs, recording audio/video, or accessing the internet
- Apple Airtags/GPS trackers

This definition applies regardless of whether the device is switched on, switched off, or in 'flight' mode.

Travelling to and from School and Parental Contact
Children may bring mobile phones or communication devices to school for use before/after school (e.g. during transit), but devices must remain switched off and out of sight throughout school hours in the below agreed procedures. Parents/carers needing to reach their child during the day should contact the school, not the child directly. This ensures that communications are managed safely and do not disrupt learning.

Recognition of Misuse of Devices
Our school recognises that mobile phone misuse may occur intentionally or unintentionally, even with stringent policies in place. **All staff understand this policy and the expectations upon them to ensure consistent responses**.
Where any incidents occur, senior leaders will review practice, identify learning, and update training and procedures accordingly.

Creating a Safeguarding Culture
A strong safeguarding culture ensures that children and staff feel safe to raise concerns and understand the expectations around device use. To create this environment:

- All staff and children will receive clear guidance on the school's mobile phone procedures.

- The school will promote vigilance and responsible digital behaviour.
- Children will be encouraged to share concerns about online harm, bullying, exploitation, or peer pressure linked to device use.
- Staff and children will feel confident in how to respond if a device is used inappropriately on site.
- Parents will support the school's approach and expectations of all children.

Staff Expectations

All adults on school site are required to support the phone-free environment. Staff members will not use personal mobile phones in the presence of children or during duty times, except in emergencies or authorised situations. Staff have separate guidelines (e.g. in the Staff Code of Conduct, Staff Behaviour Policy/Handbook) regarding the professional use of devices and are required to model the behaviour expected of children by accessing personal calls or messaging during non-contact time and in private staff areas. Visitors and volunteers are likewise requested to keep phones on silent and refrain from using them where children are, both for safeguarding reasons and to maintain consistency in the school's culture.

Effective Use of the Curriculum

A well-planned curriculum (Online Safety/PSHE/RSE/Computing) will support children in understanding:

- Online safety and digital citizenship
- The risks associated with mobile phone use
- The legal implications of sharing images or harmful content
- How to seek help if they feel unsafe online

Curriculum discussions will also provide opportunities for children to share intelligence about child-on-child abuse, exploitation, or contextual issues in the local area. Any such information will be shared with the DSL and, where appropriate, with Children's Social Care or the police.

Teachable Moments

Where a child misuses a device, this may indicate wider vulnerabilities including exploitation, bullying, mental health concerns, or coercion. Staff will explore the reasons for each incident and consider whether a safeguarding response is required.

A "reachable or teachable moment" may arise where a child is more open to support. Staff should use these opportunities to understand the child's worries, risks, and needs, and to plan appropriate intervention.

Working with Parents

Parents must adhere to this Policy and support decisions made by senior leaders. Parents should remain vigilant to their child's online behaviour and seek support where needed.

If parents believe their child is experiencing online harm or misusing a device, they should inform the school and, where appropriate, the police.

Understanding the Law and Current Guidance

This policy is informed by:

- DfE: Mobile Phones in Schools
- Searching, Screening & Confiscation: Advice for Schools
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

- Behaviour and Discipline in Schools

Schools have statutory powers to regulate children's behaviour, including the possession and use of mobile phones.

Searching, Screening and Confiscation
The school may search, screen, or confiscate a device where there are reasonable grounds to suspect:

- It has been used in breach of school rules
- It contains prohibited or harmful material
- It poses a risk to staff or children

All searches will follow statutory guidance and be recorded in the school's safeguarding system.

School Procedures for Mobile Phones
Schools must select and implement one of the following operational models and delete the others accordingly:
OPTION A: Full Ban – Central Collection

- Children hand in their device at a designated point on arrival.
- Devices are stored securely and returned at the end of the day.
- Any device found on a child will be confiscated.

OPTION B: Locker Storage/Phone Pouch

- Children may bring a device but must store it in their locker/Phone Pouch on arrival.
- Devices must remain switched off and locked away/in Phone Pouch until home time.
- Accessing a device during the day will result in confiscation.

OPTION C: Kept on Person – Away and Out of Sight

- Children may keep a device on their person, but it must be switched off and not visible.
- Devices must not be used during the school day.
- Any visible or audible device will be confiscated.

Exemptions and Reasonable Adjustments to this Policy
At Villa Real School, the expectation is that all children follow the mobile phone and communication device rules outlined in this policy. However, we recognise that in a small number of specific circumstances, exemptions or reasonable adjustments may be required to ensure children's safety, health, or access to support. Any exemption will be authorised by the Headteacher or a designated senior leader and will be clearly documented.
1. Medical Conditions
Some children may require the use of a mobile phone or connected device to support the management of a diagnosed medical condition. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Diabetes: Children using continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) systems or insulin pumps that connect to a mobile phone for real-time readings or alerts.

- Epilepsy: Children using seizure-monitoring apps or devices linked to a phone for emergency alerts.
- Chronic health conditions: Children who require access to medical apps, monitoring tools, or communication with a medical professional as part of an agreed healthcare plan.

Where a medical exemption is required:
A meeting will be held with parents/carers, the child (where appropriate), the school's medical lead, and the DSL/SENDCo to agree the parameters of use.

An Individual Healthcare Plan (IHP) will be created or updated to specify:

- what the device is used for
- when it may be accessed
- where it must be stored
- how staff will be informed and monitor use
- the device must only be used for the agreed medical purpose
- any misuse outside the medical function will result in the exemption being reviewed.

The school will always act in line with the Equality Act 2010 and statutory guidance on supporting children with medical conditions.

2. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
Some children may require access to a personal device as part of their SEND support plan. This may include:

- communication aids
- assistive technology
- apps used for emotional regulation or anxiety management
- tools that support executive functioning or organisation

Where this applies:

- The SENDCo will assess the need and determine whether a personal device is or whether a school-provided alternative is more appropriate.
- Any permitted use will be clearly defined within the child's SEND Support Plan or EHCP.
- Staff will be informed of the agreed arrangements to ensure consistency and safeguarding oversight.

3. Emergency or Exceptional Circumstances
In rare cases, a temporary exemption may be granted due to exceptional personal or family circumstances. Examples include:

- a child needing to be contactable due to a family emergency
- a child experiencing a safeguarding concern where monitored communication is part of a safety plan
- a short-term arrangement agreed with social care or another agency

Where this applies:

- the exemption will be time-limited and reviewed regularly
- the device will normally be held by staff and accessed only under supervision
- the DSL will oversee the arrangement to ensure safeguarding integrity

4. Curriculum-Based Use

On occasion, a teacher may authorise the use of mobile phones or devices for a specific, planned learning activity (e.g., photography, fieldwork, or digital research). In these cases:

- Permission applies only for the duration of the activity.
- Devices must be used under direct staff supervision.
- Children must return to full compliance immediately after the activity ends.

Conditions of all Exemptions

All exemptions are granted on the basis that:

- the device is used solely for the agreed purpose
- the child follows all instructions from staff
- the exemption is reviewed if concerns arise
- misuse may result in the exemption being withdrawn

School retains the right to search or confiscate a device if there are safeguarding concerns or if the device is used outside the agreed parameters, in line with statutory guidance.

Taking Action in the Event of Mobile Phone or Device Misuse

Where a device is used inappropriately, school will conduct a full and thorough investigation. Immediate action will be taken where:

- A device has been used to bully, harass, or intimidate.
- Images or videos have been taken without consent.
- Harmful or illegal content has been shared.
- A device has been used to facilitate exploitation or abuse.

School may isolate the child, confiscate the device, and contact parents and/or the police depending on the severity of the incident. This will follow our school's Behaviour Policy.

Gathering the Facts

Staff will speak to all children involved separately, using consistent language and open questions. A clear, factual record will be made and stored in line with school procedures.

Considering Intent

The school will consider whether the misuse was:

- deliberate
- accidental
- coerced
- linked to wider safeguarding concerns

This informs the next steps.

Deciding on the Next course of Action

Actions may include:

- Confiscation
- Sanctions in line with the Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding referral

Using or Collecting Devices at the End of the School Day

<u>Schools must select and implement one of the following operational models and delete the others accordingly:</u>

Children who keep phones in their bags must continue to have them turned off and put away until they have left the school premises. The phone should not be turned on until the child is outside the school gates (or on school transport). Staff on duty will supervise departures and may remind children of this rule. Once outside school (and safely away from congested exits), children may turn on their phones to contact family or use it as needed for their journey.
Or
At the end of the school day staff will return devices to children. This will be done by bringing the secure storage to each class or having children come to a collection point. Children must not use the device until they have exited school premises, as above. If a child must leave early (e.g., for an appointment), they can collect their phone from the office upon signing out (staff will verify their early departure). If a child forgets to collect their phone, they should go to the office; unclaimed devices will be kept securely until claimed.

After-School Activities:
The phone ban extends through any on-site after-school clubs (since these are still school-supervised times). Children attending after-school activities should continue to leave phones off. They may collect or turn on phones once the activity ends, just as they would at normal dismissal. If a club ends significantly later than the school day, staff may allow participants to pick up phones right after school solely to keep them safe (depending on supervision), but not to use them until leaving later.

School Trips and Residentials:
This policy is to be followed unless otherwise stated.

Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders
Governing Body/Proprietors:
Governors/proprietors will support the Headteacher in enforcing this policy and ensure that adequate resources (such as secure storage facilities for devices) are provided. The Governing Body will ensure the policy is aligned with the school's statutory duties (e.g. duty of care, safeguarding, equality) and that it is communicated to parents. They will receive reports on any significant issues or incidents related to mobile phones and will take these into account during policy reviews.
Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team (SLT):
The Headteacher has primary responsibility for the implementation and day-to-day enforcement of this policy. The Headteacher/SLT will:

- Lead on policy communication (e.g., discussing it in assemblies, parent newsletters).
- Ensure staff are trained and consistently applying the rules; address any staff who are unsure or not enforcing.
- Make determinations on any exceptions or individual cases.
- Support staff in disciplinary actions if conflicts arise from confiscation or enforcement.
- Oversee the sanctions process, ensuring it is fair and effective.
- Liaise with the Designated Safeguarding Lead on any incidents where phone misuse overlaps with safeguarding.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the policy over time.

- Report to Governors on how the policy is working in practice and recommend any changes as needed.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Safeguarding Team:
The DSL (and any deputies) are responsible for the safeguarding aspects of this policy. They ensure that:

- The policy supports the wider safeguarding framework.
- Any incident where a phone or device is used to inflict harm (such as sharing harmful content, filming fights, cyberbullying) is dealt with under safeguarding and child protection procedures. This could include securing evidence from a device, contacting external agencies (like the police or children's social care) if the content is illegal or harmful, and providing support to affected children.
- Staff receive training for any emerging mobile, related safeguarding issues (for instance sexting, inappropriate use of cameras, etc), in line with Keep Children Safe in Education.
- If a need for an exception for a vulnerable child arises (as stated above) the DSL can support that plan, so it remains safe.
- The policy doesn't inadvertently isolate or punish victims of phone-related incidents.

All School Staff (teachers, support staff, admin, etc.):
Every staff member is expected to enforce and model the policy:
Enforcement: Staff will intervene consistently whenever they see a child violating the policy. This means confidently requesting the handover of devices and issuing reminders or sanctions according to the procedures.
Classroom Management: At the start of classes, teachers may incorporate checks like "ensure your phones are off and away" into routine, even if children are already expected to have done so.
If a teacher uses educational technology in class, they will ensure it doesn't conflict with this policy (i.e., only school-sanctioned devices or times).
Modelling Behaviour: Staff will lead by example by not using their personal phones in front of children.
Secure Handling: Staff who collect or confiscate devices have the responsibility to keep them secure and to pass them to the correct storage point promptly.
Staff will help communicate this policy to children and parents, especially at the start of the year.
Monitoring & Reporting: Staff will document incidents of phone misuse in the school's behaviour log system, noting date, child, and action taken.

Children:
Children themselves have an important responsibility to follow the rules and develop good digital discipline:
Compliance: Children must turn off and put away their devices as required and not attempt to use them during school hours. They are responsible for remembering the rules.

Respect & Honesty: Children should not pressure peers to break the rules. They should understand that the rules create a better environment for everyone.

Personal Responsibility: Children take responsibility for the safety of their device when bringing it. They should have it clearly labelled and keep it safe until handing in. They should also ensure its sufficiently charged for after-school use if needed, as they won't have access to it or be able to charge it during the day.

Parents and Carers:

Parents and carers are expected to:

Understand and Agree to the Policy: When this policy is introduced or updated, parents should read it and direct any questions to the school. By sending their child to the school with a phone, parents are agreeing to the terms of this policy.

Ensure Child Compliance: Parents should discuss the policy with their children and make sure they understand the importance of following it. Parents should not give their child conflicting messages this undermines the school's efforts and puts the child in a difficult position. Instead, parents should reinforce that rules must be respected.

Provide Appropriate Device (or None): If a child does not truly need a phone, parents are encouraged not to let them bring one. Parents should also ensure any device's content (apps, media) is age-appropriate and ideally use parental controls, given that while at school the phone won't be accessible, it may still affect the child outside school.

Communication via School: As stated, parents must use school channels to contact children during the day. Parents should also make sure the school has up-to-date contact information so that if the school needs to reach them (e.g., child unwell), they are reachable quickly.

Support Consequences: If a child has their phone confiscated or faces a sanction due to misuse, parents are expected to support the school's decision. If a parent disagrees with an aspect of the policy, they are encouraged to discuss it through proper channels rather than advising the child to disobey it.

ICT/Network Manager (if applicable):

The ICT team ensures that if any school Wi-Fi is available to children's mobile phones, they are not allowed to exploit it. They will enforce technical measures such as blocking personal devices from the network during school hours or using mobile device management for school-owned devices to prevent misuse. They also ensure that any online safety filters are robust so that, in the event a child did get online, the risk is mitigated.

Review of Circumstances

Following any significant incident, the school will review whether anything could have been done differently. Lessons learned will inform policy, training, and practice.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Searching, Screening & Confiscation: Advice for Schools
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Safeguarding Matters Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

- Behaviour and Discipline Policy
- Child Protection Policy