Mobile Phone & Personal Digital Device Policy

Mount Carmel Secondary School
Patron/Trusteeship: Religious Sisters of Charity
Approved by: Board of Management
Date:

1. Opening

Mount Carmel Secondary School is an all-girls Catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of the Religious Sisters of Charity. In the tradition of the Religious Sisters of Charity, we seek to form young women of competence, conscience, and compassionate commitment. This policy sets out the school's approach to student possession and use of mobile phones and personal digital devices in order to promote a safe, respectful, and focused learning environment.

2. Mission Statement

Guided by the values of the Gospel, our community promotes *cura personalis*—care for the whole person—and the common good. We strive to safeguard student wellbeing, dignity, and learning

by minimising digital distraction and misuse, while supporting prudent, age-appropriate digital citizenship.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all students at all times on school property and during any school-related activity, whether on or off campus, including but not limited to: classrooms, corridors, social areas, the yard, the canteen, assemblies, extra-curricular activities, trips, and sanctioned events.

Devices covered include:

- Mobile phones, smartwatches, tablets, laptops, earbuds/headphones, gaming devices, and any internet-enabled personal device.
- Visitors, contractors, and volunteers must also respect the school's phone/device-free environment and follow staff directions.

4. Definitions

- **Device:** Any mobile phone or personal digital device capable of calling, messaging, recording (audio, photo, or video), gaming, or internet access.
- **Phone/device-free school:** Devices are not to be seen, heard, used, or worn (including smartwatches/earbuds) during the school day on school grounds.
- **School day:** From the moment a student enters the school gate until the student exits the gate at the end of the day, including breaks and transitions.

5. Rationale

The policy aims to:

- Protect teaching, learning, and attention by removing digital distractions.

- Safeguard student privacy and dignity by preventing unauthorised recording or sharing.
- Support respectful relationships and reduce cyberbullying risks within the school day.
- Model balanced, healthy, and ethical technology use consistent with Religious Sisters of Charity values and Irish educational guidance.

6. Policy Statement: Phone/Device-Free School

6.1 The school is a phone/device-free school at all times during the school day and at all school activities. Devices must be powered off (not on silent or airplane mode) and stored out of sight in a secure schoolbag or locker.

6.2 The Board of Management recognises that, for safety reasons associated with commuting to and from our city-centre location, students may carry a device to school. However, once a student enters the school gate, the device must be powered off and stored as above.

6.3 Smartwatches and wireless earbuds/headphones are considered devices and must not be worn or used during the school day.

6.4 Personal hotspots/tethering are prohibited on school grounds.

6.5 Use of any device for recording (audio, photo, or video) on school grounds or during school activities is strictly prohibited without prior, explicit staff permission for a specific educational purpose.

7. Procedures

Arrival and Departure:

- Devices may be used off campus only and for travel safety purposes before arrival and after leaving school grounds.
- Upon entering the gate, devices must be powered off and stored immediately; they may only be powered on again after exiting the gate at day's end.

During the School Day:

- Devices must remain powered off and out of sight in bags/lockers at all times, including break and lunch.
- Headphones/earbuds must be stored and not worn.
- Students should not check messages, notifications, or time on devices or smartwatches; corridor clocks and classroom clocks are provided.

Emergencies and Parent Contact:

- In urgent situations, students may request supervised access to a school phone via Reception/Year Head/Deputy Principal.
- Parents/guardians needing to contact a student during the day should phone Reception. Messages will be relayed promptly.
- In a critical incident managed by staff, directions regarding communication will be given; personal device use remains prohibited unless expressly authorised.

8. Reasonable Accommodations & Limited Exceptions

- Assistive technology (e.g., a dedicated device for a documented learning or medical need) may be permitted where formally recommended and approved by the school (SEN Team and Senior Leadership), with specified conditions of use.
- State examinations and assessment accommodations follow State Examinations Commission (SEC) and Department of Education guidance.
- Any exception must be written, time-bound, and documented; verbal permissions do not constitute an exception.

9. Data Protection, Child Safeguarding & Online Safety

The school is committed to GDPR compliance and child safeguarding. Unauthorised recording, sharing of images or audio, or online conduct that breaches privacy, dignity, or safety is

prohibited. Alleged breaches may be addressed under the Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying Policy, Child Safeguarding Statement, and relevant Irish law.

10. Sanctions & Restorative Responses

The school emphasises formation and restorative practices in the Christian tradition. However, where rules are breached, proportionate sanctions will apply:

- **First breach:** Device confiscated immediately by staff and stored in a secure location; device returned to the student at the end of the school day; behaviour note recorded.
- **Second breach (in a term):** Device confiscated immediately by staff and stored in a secure location; device returned to student at end of school day; parent/guardian contacted; student required to leave device with Principal/Deputy Principal each morning at 8.30am for a period of 2 weeks. Device returned at the end of each day.
- **Subsequent breaches:** Any further breaches of the policy will result in parent/guardian being notified and the student being required to leave the device with the Principal/Deputy Principal each morning at 8.30am for the remainder of the term. Escalated sanctions may also include a behaviour contract, or suspension in serious/repeated cases, in line with the Code of Behaviour.
- **Serious misconduct (e.g., recording/streaming, harassment, bullying, sharing harmful content):** May result in immediate suspension pending investigation and other measures per Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying or Child Protection procedures; Gardaí may be informed where required by law.

11. Confiscation, Secure Storage & Retrieval

- Staff may request a device; refusal is a serious breach. Students must comply and power off the device before handing it over.
- Confiscated devices are stored in a secure location.

- The school is not responsible for loss/damage to personal devices on school property; students bring devices at their own risk.

12. Roles & Responsibilities

- **Students:** Follow this policy; keep devices powered off and out of sight; cooperate with staff; act respectfully online and offline.
- **Parents/Guardians:** Support the policy; contact the school office—not the student's device—during the day; model responsible use.
- **Teachers & Staff:** Enforce the policy consistently and respectfully; log incidents; apply restorative approaches where appropriate.
- **Year Heads/SEN Team:** Coordinate supports, reasonable accommodations, and parent communication as needed.
- **Senior Leadership & Board of Management:** Ensure policy implementation, review, staff training, and communication.

13. Communication & Education

- Policy communicated via school app, website, enrolment pack, and assemblies.
- Digital citizenship education embedded in SPHE/Wellbeing and relevant subjects; parent information evenings provided periodically.

14. Monitoring, Evaluation & Review

The policy will be monitored through staff feedback, behaviour logs, and student/parent voice. It will be formally reviewed every year or sooner if required by legislation, Department of Education circulars, or school need.

15. Related Policies & Documents

- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)
- Child Safeguarding Statement & Risk Assessment
- Data Protection Policy (GDPR)
- Critical Incident Management Plan

16. Legal & Regulatory Framework (Ireland)

- Education Act 1998 and subsequent amendments
- Education (Welfare) Act 2000
- Children First Act 2015 and Children First: National Guidance
- Equal Status Acts 2000–2018
- Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997
- Criminal Justice (Offences Relating to Information Systems) Act 2017
- Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 (Coco's Law)
- GDPR and Data Protection Acts 1988–2018
- Department of Education circulars and guidance as updated
- State Examinations Commission guidance on reasonable accommodations

17. Adoption, Dissemination & Implementation

- This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on [Date].
- It becomes effective on [Effective Date].
- It will be circulated to all parents/guardians and students and published on the school website.

18. Signatures

Chairperson, Board of Management: _____ Date: _____

Principal: _____ Date: _____