



Circular 0045/2025

To: Managerial Authorities, and Principals of Recognised Post-Primary Schools, the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards

Restricting the use of and access to personal mobile phones by students during the school day

Schools are required to implement a policy to restrict the use of and access to, personal mobile phones by students in all recognised schools for the duration of the school day.

This policy is intended to support schools, in

- improving the learning environment in schools by reducing distraction
- reducing the risk of cyberbullying and access to inappropriate content during school hours
- increasing traditional social interactions between students at school break times.

While schools are already managing the use of personal mobile phones by students during the school day through existing policies, including the Acceptable Use Policy, schools are now expected to formalise and implement a policy to restrict the use of personal mobile phones by students during the school day, including during breaks and at lunchtime. This policy should be published on the school website and made available to students and parents and be subject to ongoing review as needed.

This policy will build on the existing school policies in this area and will enable children and young people to disconnect from their online world and connect more with their peers for the duration of the school day.

The restriction on the use of phones does not apply to travel to and from school or during after school activities/study, which can be managed in accordance with schools' discretionary procedures.

Consultation with the school community is a key feature of this measure.



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Background

- Schools play a vital role in promoting wellbeing and mental health by equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to deal with the challenges that may impact on their wellbeing.
- It is recognised that technology is ever evolving and increasingly part of everyday life. However, excessive mobile phone use, and screentime generally, can have a detrimental impact on students’ concentration and academic performance. Ensuring that students are not using their mobile phone for personal use during the school day can help to address these issues and foster an environment more conducive to learning, as well as supporting in-person engagement with their peers.
- The policy to restrict the use of phones by students during the school day, outside of limited exceptions, will enable schools to provide a phone-free environment, to support students’ wellbeing, concentration, academic performance, and development. It will provide a space for children and young people to disconnect from their online world and can assist in supporting them to become less dependent on their mobile phones.
- Research including the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report “Technology in Education a tool on whose terms”, and the Norwegian Screen Use Committee Report on the impact of the use of mobile



phones during the school day on wellbeing and academic performance, will continue to inform department policy and resources in this area.

Purpose of the Guidance

This guidance outlines the steps that schools should take to implement this approach and also outlines the supports that the department has in place to equip children and young people with the knowledge and skills to navigate the online world in a safe and ethical manner. This includes comprehensive advice for parents/guardians and young people, as well as resources for schools and teachers.

The use of digital technology in teaching, learning and assessment

The department's policy on the embedding of digital technologies in education is outlined in the [Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027](#), and its associated Implementation Plan. The strategy aims to realise the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students so that all learners have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills they need to successfully navigate an ever-evolving digital world. This approach reflects the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) digital rights which, while it includes that the right to protection and safety in the digital environment underpins all children's rights, since the risk of harm in the digital environment has real consequences for a child's wellbeing, also states that the right to education today includes digital literacy, and to opportunities and resources to learn in the digital environment.

In consulting with their school community, schools should highlight their Digital Learning Plan, to outline the approach to the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning in the school. The difference between academic and non-academic use of digital technology, including internet-enabled devices, should be clarified. The development of digital competence including digital and media literacy to support children and young people remains of key importance, to enable them to reach their potential and participate fully as global citizens in a digital world. The Department of Education and Youth's response to the provision of digital skills and literacy within early childhood and care and school settings is covered in the following:

- Curriculum – Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle.
- Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027
- STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026
- Digital Learning Framework
- Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood



Consultation with the school community

Schools are skilled and practiced at engaging with their school community on many issues. They are aware of the benefits of consulting with parents/guardians, students, teachers, and non-teaching staff to support the development and implementation of school policies and have structures in place to facilitate such engagement. The implementation of this policy should be supported by schools through their existing consultation mechanisms, which may include:

- information sessions with students, parents/guardians and school staff
- discussion with student councils or other similar mechanisms established in schools
- engagement with parents' associations
- workshops and/or focus groups.
- questionnaires and surveys
- usual staff meetings between teaching staff, non-teaching staff and school leaders
- use of specific school committees such as the school's student support team or equivalent.

The topics for consideration during the consultation should include:

- the appropriateness of allowing students to bring their mobile phones to school but requiring them to have their phone turned off at all times unless an exemption is given by a member of staff.
- whether the school should use a specific mechanism to implement the restriction; for example: cubbies, lockers, pouches, handing in to the school office etc. Consideration should be given to administration and practicality. Some examples of existing practices are outlined further below.
- how to manage and apply exemptions to the restriction in cases of identified and agreed need, including consideration of how to administer such exceptions (for example, an application procedure, assessment and appeal mechanism, and facilitation of accommodations for individual students in a school). Some scenarios that may need to be considered are outlined below. Schools should consider the reasonable



accommodations that can be made and may have existing precedent. Any such exemptions should be based on fair and transparent grounds.

- the approach to be taken to extra-curricular activities/activities taking place outside of school, but organised and overseen by the school. The intention of the restriction is that it will apply throughout the school day. Some flexibility may however be required when there are school activities taking place off school grounds. This should only be considered and applied to the extent that it is needed for purposes that may include safeguarding and other determined reasons, for example, to facilitate collection by parents/guardians where arrangements change, or a student must leave unexpectedly.
- activities taking place outside of school hours, but which are deemed to be school activities, for example, after-school study, rehearsals for school shows, are not subject to this restriction; however, in consultation with the school community, it may be agreed that some limitations can be applied as agreed.
- consideration as to whether the use by students of personal mobile phones is required to support the provision of teaching and learning in general or to support students with specific additional needs and how to implement a policy to facilitate that.

Relevant School Policies

The school should review and if necessary update relevant existing school policies and procedures, which may include

- **Acceptable Usage Policy** – this details acceptable use of Internet enabled devices, and related devices in the school. This policy must be agreed and signed by students and their parents/guardians. Advice is available on Webwise at <https://www.webwise.ie/category/teachers/acceptable-use-policy/>
- **Bí Cineálta Policy** – this is the school’s policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour. The **Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2024** require schools to develop and implement a **Bí Cineálta** policy that sets out how the school community prevents and addresses bullying behaviour. This policy should include strategies specifically aimed at preventing online bullying behaviour,



homophobic and transphobic bullying behaviour, racist bullying behaviour, sexist bullying behaviour and sexual harassment, as appropriate.

- **Data Protection Policy** – this policy should be reviewed and updated as necessary, www.dataprotectionschools.ie is an information resource for schools to support the ongoing development of data protection policies
- **Code of Behaviour** – this code and related policies should be reviewed and updated to take account of the restriction on the use of personal mobile phones in schools unless as expressly provided for via an agreed exemption, or as instructed by a teacher/appropriate member of school staff. The policy should address school procedures where students do not adhere to the restriction.
- **Child Protection Policies and procedures, including management of exemptions.**
- **Wellbeing** – the school’s wellbeing policy should be reviewed to ensure the area of safe and ethical use of the internet is addressed in the context of the whole-school approach to wellbeing.

Schools should take the opportunity during the consultation processes to inform students, parents/guardians and school staff on the broader issue of online safety and the resources provided by the department, and further information is provided below to enable this.

Mechanisms to implement the policy

While schools already have measures in place to restrict the personal use of mobile phones, schools should now have a consistent approach to ensure a restriction is implemented for the duration of the school day. The method chosen to determine and agree the practical arrangements to implement the approach is a decision for each school. Examples that are used across the system include

- locking storage pouches for mobile phones, provided to each student, typically unlocked via a magnetic mechanism, access to which is controlled by the school.
- in storage boxes at lockers, in lockable boxes in classrooms



- handed in to school office on arrival to school
- kept in cubbies in classrooms/other areas

Possible exemptions that may apply

Schools are advised to adopt a compassionate and common-sense approach, that is fair and transparent in application to how to apply exemptions to the restriction.

Exemptions should only apply for medical, wellbeing or specific practical reasons, or for reasons related to students' special educational needs. The exemptions should allow students to access their phones for the specific reason outlined in the exemption, and not for general use.

The examples below are not exhaustive and consideration will be needed on a case-by-case basis.

Examples of some of the possible issues where exemptions are justified may include but are not limited to:

- Diabetes blood glucose monitor and/or insulin delivery mechanism.
- Blood pressure monitoring.
- Seizure conditions where monitoring via a mobile phone app is needed.
- Mental health conditions, where communication with parents/guardians on an unrestricted basis is needed.
- Additional/special educational needs, for specific tasks relating to a student's visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech and language impairments.
- Access by an English as an Additional Language (EAL) student to specific applications to support language.

Procurement Considerations



Where it is determined following consultation that a specific solution such as a pouch or locked box will be implemented, schools must ensure that they adhere to all relevant procurement legislation and regulations in acquiring such mechanisms. To assist schools and ensure compliance with all such requirements, the department is establishing a procurement Mobile Phone Storage Solutions available for schools to draw down from to easily access an appropriate, fully evaluated, solution. This will be announced by the department in autumn 2025 at the earliest.

Funding

As announced in Budget 2025, total funding of €9 million is available across post-primary schools to fund the provision of a mobile phone storage solution in 2025. Details of how schools can access an allocation of this funding will be published by the department and will provide information as to the criteria applying to this funding. Further provision of up to €1m is available for each year for three years subsequent to 2025 to provide for replacement, based on the anticipation that only a subset of solutions procured will need replacement in each year.

Further supports and resources

[Webwise](#) Ireland's Safer Internet Awareness Centre

- [Webwise](#) is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre, which provides free information, resources for schools, families and young people on online safety and digital citizenship.
- Webwise develops and disseminates [free resources](#) that help teachers integrate digital citizenship and online safety into teaching and learning in their schools. Webwise also provides information, advice, and tools to [parents](#) to support their engagement in their children's online lives. With the help of the [Webwise Youth Advisory Panel](#), Webwise creates youth-oriented awareness raising resources and training programmes that promote digital citizenship and address topics such as online wellbeing and cyberbullying.
- Webwise is funded by the Department of Education and Youth and co-funded through the European Commission and is part of the Irish Safer Internet Centre. The Irish Safer Internet Centre is a partnership of four leading organisations – [Webwise](#), [Hotline.ie](#), [Irish Society for the](#)



[Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(ISPCC\)](#) and [National Parents Council](#) - with a mission to make the Internet a better place for children and young people under the coordination of the Department of Justice.

Oide (Teacher Education Support Service)

- Oide has a dedicated Health and Wellbeing team that supports teachers and schools, through the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum to develop and promote the personal development, health, and wellbeing of the student; to create a positive school environment and culture; and to prevent and address bullying behaviour including online bullying and harassment.
- Oide's dedicated Technology in Education area including professional learning leader teams of seconded teachers for primary and post-primary sectors, design, develop and deliver a comprehensive range of teacher professional learning programmes to support the embedding of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment. This includes enhancing the competence development of teachers and school leaders to ensure a digitally competent and confident education system, which will in turn foster the development of digital competence, knowledge and understanding in our student population as provided for in the curriculum.

The National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) has developed a range of wellbeing information and supports for schools, students and parents/guardians which are available on gov.ie.

A catalogue of resources provides a non-exhaustive list of documents and resources that are provided by the Department of Education and Youth, its agencies, support services, other government departments and their agencies and by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to assist the promotion of wellbeing across school communities are available on gov.ie.

Information on Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying, the Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2024 and the Resources to support implementation of a school's Bí Cineálta Policy are available on gov.ie.

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