19th July 2024

Dear Parents / Carers,

I am writing to inform you about a new initiative and policy on mobile phones that is due to be introduced in September on students return to the academy.

Ormiston Academies Trust are moving towards phone free schools in line with recent published government guidance and extensive research. As an academy, we wholeheartedly support this initiative as we believe it will support our students across a range of areas such as behaviour, attainment but most importantly; mental health.

At OCA we aim to lay the foundations for a successful future and we do this through creating a calm, safe and distraction free environment alongside a knowledge rich-curriculum and excellent teaching.

Data shows that students spend a large quantity of time on their devices:

- Children aged 13-18 spend nearly 8.5 hours using devices (Rideout et al, 2022).

- 35% of 13–14-year-olds and 52% of 15–17-year-olds say they are on line ‘constantly’ (PEW Research Centre, 2022).

The problematic impact of smart phone use on pupils seems to fall into two broad categories:

1) Learning and academic performance

2) Mental health and wellbeing.

**Learning and Academic Performance**

“Mobile phones risk unnecessary distraction, disruption and diversion. One in three secondary school pupils report that mobile phones are used in most lessons without permission. This not only distracts the single pupil using the phone, but disrupts the lesson for a whole class, and diverts teachers’ efforts away from learning.” (1)

Thornton states that the ‘mere presence’ of a phone, even if is not being used, can still ‘serve as a distractor and result in attentional and performance deficits.’ (2) The deficits noticed in the study were not present during simple tasks, but appeared when participants were asked to engage in more complex tasks – exactly the sorts of tasks we (at OAT) want pupils to be engaging in on a daily basis.

A study (Beland and Murphy, 2015) which surveyed schools in four English cities (Birmingham, Leicester, London and Manchester) found that ‘student performance in high stakes exams significantly increases post ban’. (3) Specifically, introducing a mobile phone ban in schools increased students’ GCSE scores. The impact of the ban was especially positive for lower-achieving students.

**Mental Health**

“Three in ten pupils cite making and maintaining friendships and their mental health as a cause of worry, anxiety or depression.” (4) “By removing mobile phones, children and young people can spend more time staying active and socialising face to face with their peers, activities which have a positive impact on wellbeing”(5). This will enable us to develop these habits, which in turn will help them thrive on the outside of school.

One study by Jean Twenge found that moderate use of mobile phones (4 hours per day) was associated with lower psychological well-being. Individuals who spent more than 7 hours per day were less; curious, self-controlled, and emotionally stable and more than twice as likely to:

• Have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety

• Have been treated by a mental health professional

• Have taken medication for behavioural issues in the last 12 months.

We feel that given all of this evidence that we owe it to our students to do what we can to remove distractions, help with their mental health and keep them safe. By choosing to remove mobile phones from the school day, our academy trust is committed to supporting students via creating a safe space where they are protected from the risks and dangers associated with social media, theft and cyberbullying, both mentally and physically.

**New Academy Procedure**

From September, students will switch off and hand in mobile phones at the beginning of every day during am registration. Each student will have an allocated number in their lock box in their form room. Each lock box will then be collected by the Senior Leadership Team and Head of Years and moved to a locked, secure location in a room next to the Principal’s office.

Students will have the phones returned to them at the end of the school day to their form room during afternoon registration. If a student has received a detention, then the phone will be returned to them after that detention.

Students who arrive late to school and therefore miss morning registration will have phones taken from them at the entrance and these will be stored in a separate secure box for which will also be locked away in the secure room next to the Principal’s office.

If a student refuses to hand in a mobile phone then there will be consequences for that student. If a student informs the academy that they do not have a mobile phone on them, but are later found to have one, then this phone will be confiscated and can be collected by a parent/carer between 3pm and 4:30pm from reception.

If you require to contact your child during the school day then we ask that you contact the school reception on 0151 424 5038. The receptionist can then call your child to reception on the tannoy system to come and have that conversation with you.

Thank you in advance for your support, we know you want to ensure the best outcomes and positive wellbeing for your child.

Yours Faithfully



Mrs J Lowry-Johnson

Principal

Appendix

1 - Mobile phones in school government guidance

2 Thornton, et al. (2014) The Mere Presence of a Cell Phone May be Distracting Implications for Attention and Task Performance

3 Beland, L-P and Murphy, R. (2015) Ill Communication: Technology, Distraction & Student Performance Christodoulou, D. (2024)

4 https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/health-impacts-screen-time-guide-clinicians-parents#downloadBox

5 https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/health-impacts-screen-time-guide-clinicians-parents#downloadBox

6 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/onlinebullyinginenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020

7 Twenge, J. and Campbell, W.K. (2018) Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents: Evidence from a population-based study Warner, J. (2024) The kids aren’t all right. Are phones really to blame?