

The Bourne Academy Smartphones

Frequently Asked Questions from Parent/Carer survey:

Why is the Academy introducing a new smartphone policy?

The Government has introduced guidance requiring schools to be smartphone free during the school day. We have carefully considered how best to implement this in a way that works for our setting. Alongside this, we are seeing increasing levels of anxiety and mental health concerns among young people. We want to support families in reducing exposure to harmful online content, particularly during times when children may be less supervised

Why is the Academy not just enforcing the current phone rules?

Our current approach of “not seen, not heard” where phones are switched off and kept in bags is no longer considered sufficient under Government guidance. Updated DfE and Ofsted guidance, shows that “not seen, not heard” is no longer enough to keep children safe. Smartphones are increasingly linked to distraction, social conflict, bullying, and exposure to harmful content. National policy now expects schools to be mobile-phone-free environments by default.

Why is the Academy not providing a storage solution/lockers in school for smart phones?

We have explored these options looking at and visiting schools that have trialled these approaches. We decided this was not the right approach for The Bourne Academy. Some of our concerns are:

- An immersion in the smartphone immediately after leaving the school site, this is an unsafe time for smartphone distraction while near traffic
- The sharing of extreme violence or explicit content spikes during the journey home where adults are not present
- The costs are prohibitive as lockers have been easily broken into or damaged in schools that have trialled this
- The Academy does not have the capacity to house lockers in a single secure location
- Additional staff would be required to manage phones for students leaving early or arriving late to school

Why is the Academy not using storage pouches onsite to keep the school phone free?

We have explored this approach to making the Academy smartphone free. We decided that this was not the right approach for The Bourne Academy. Some of our concerns are:

- The availability of unlocking tools on the internet
- Online tutorials in how to open pouches are readily available
- Additional staff would be required to manage phones for students leaving early or arriving late to school
- Children feel they must own a smartphone by the time they start secondary school to be seen with one to put in a pouch

Why is the Academy not collecting the phones in in trays in morning registration and returning in the afternoon to keep the school phone free?

We have explored collection as an approach for making the Academy smartphone free. We decided that this was not the right approach for The Bourne Academy. Some of our concerns are:

- Children do not go back to registration at the end of the Academy day, so their phones would not be available from the teacher they end the day with

- Lessons would need to finish early to allow time for staff and students to return to registration to distribute phones, this impacts on other activities and pastoral matters that happen at the end of the day
- The responsibility for the phones during the day would require secure storage, a central secure storage for approximately 1000 phones is not possible due to security and fire risk
- Individual classrooms and offices do not have the security to secure 30 mobile phones
- Additional staff would be required to manage phones for students leaving early or arriving late to school

The policy feels like a punishment to the children and an over stretch by the school

We do not wish to punish the children, but wish to keep them safe from the dangers of smartphones. It is absolutely not the fault of the children that the apps and content are specifically designed to be addictive and the algorithms are so personalised and can draw children down a dangerous path. Sometimes the protective measures that we put in place as parents/carers with strict rules and parental controls can be completely pointless if another child holds up their phone and shows your child harmful content. They simply cannot unsee that.

Simon Bailey, the National Policing Lead on Child Protection and Abuse Investigations (2014-2021) *A simple call-or-text only phone is more than enough if children need to be in contact with home on the way to and from school. The evidence is increasingly clear: a smartphone in a child's pocket opens a door to risks that far outweigh any benefits. The physical journey to school is statistically much safer than the digital journey a child takes once they unlock that screen, so we are trading a manageable physical risk for a profound digital one. I deeply empathize with parents; in an uncertain world connection feels like a vital safety net but our priority must be to protect our children, not soothe parental anxiety.*

We do understand that most parents have been in favour of banning smartphones from the Academy, but some of you are concerned about safety during the school journey. Unfortunately, as you can see above, we have considered the possible measures for storage on the Academy site and have determined that this isn't going to produce the phone free environment that we need to ensure.

When will the policy start from?

The policy will take effect from September 2026

Why have only three non-smart phones been permitted?

Unfortunately, there are manufacturers who are making devices that look like a non-smart phone, but still have smart capabilities. To ensure consistency and safety, we have approved **four** clearly identifiable phones. We are happy to keep this under review and as other devices become available that are preferable, we will consider adding them.

I am concerned that tracking devices won't be as accurate without as many phones coming out of school at the same time.

Tracking devices, such as tags or tiles, operate differently from smartphones. This approach has been recommended by schools that have successfully implemented similar policies and has been shown to work effectively in both urban and town settings.

I am worried that if an incident happens on the school journey, I will need the videos taken as proof of the incident

We would like to assure you that reports of incidents do not rely on videos taken. The increase in AI technology and the ability to manipulate videos means that these are increasingly unreliable.

Where do I contact the Academy for the medical exception communication?

We should already be aware of most cases but please inform the Head of Year and SENDCO in the first instance.
I do not wish to purchase the non-smart phone for my child
Purchasing a non-smartphone is not compulsory. It is an option for families who wish their child to have a means of communication for emergencies or changes to arrangements.
I am concerned that I cannot afford a second contract for my child in their non-smart phone.
We do not recommend entering into a contract. A simple pay-as-you-go SIM e.g. £10 credit, is typically sufficient, as the phone would only be used occasionally for calls or texts.
Why is the policy different for students in the Sixth Form?
The different boundaries for students in the Sixth Form are in line with the Government guidance where access is permitted to limited locations. We have chosen for this to not be in view of lower school students. As these students are over 16 the guidance sees this as a step towards independence and responsibility.
What is the policy for staff use of phones?
Staff do not use personal phones for non-work purposes in front of students. However, we recognise the importance of modelling appropriate and professional use of technology in the modern world.
It is hypocritical to set online homework while ensuring a smartphone free school?
We understand that children are growing up in a digital world and do need to be taught how to safely navigate the online world. The online homework is one of the ways that this can happen in a supervised, structured manner. This helps to develop some of the skills they will need. Students are welcome to stay at the Academy for homework club if you have concerns about access to the internet.
How long would a suspension be for repeat breaches of the policy or for refusing a search?
All suspension decisions are taken on a case by case basis, other behaviours and previous conduct are considered when making this decision. However, persistent breaches of our behaviour policy demonstrates a clear disregard for these and Government guidelines. Therefore, the student may face severe additional sanctions, including those afforded to bringing in a banned/prohibited item.
Does the Academy have the right to search a student?
Schools have legal powers to search for prohibited items. From September, smartphones will be classified as a banned/prohibited item and will fall within these powers.
TBA already has a phone free policy in place, so why is the question asking for parent views on something already in place, and making out it will be a new no phone policy?
We do not have a smartphone free policy. Our current policy allows for them to be on site, not seen, not heard and if so removed. Smartphone free would mean no smartphones allowed on site by students at all, including within bags or locking them away, so that they cannot access them. Updated DfE and Ofsted guidance, shows that “not seen, not heard” is no longer enough to keep children safe. Smartphones are increasingly linked to distraction, social conflict, bullying, and exposure to harmful content. National policy now expects schools to be mobile-phone-free environments by default.