



Mobile Phone & Smart Technology Policy

2026 - 2028

Policy issue and updates

<i>Pages</i>	<i>Issue No.</i>	<i>Date</i>
Whole Document – new format and template used. Separated from curriculum policy	1	April 2026
Whole document review and sign off	2	August 2026

DfE “Mobile phones in schools” guidance (updated 19 February 2026); Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2025 (proposed statutory amendment, April 2026); Keeping Children Safe in Education; Education and Inspections Act 2006 (ss.91, 93, 94); Education Act 1996 s.550ZA; Equality Act 2010; Children and Families Act 2014; Data Protection Act 2018 / UK GDPR.

The following policy has been approved by the Divisional CEO and Governing Board of Directors.

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis unless circumstances arise requiring the policy to be reviewed earlier.

Approved by Divisional CEO: August 2026

Board signatory: 

Planned review: August 2028

1. Policy overview

Progress Arc is part of a national network of independent secondary alternative provision (AP)/ specialist SEN schools supporting students aged 7–19 with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and students who have struggled to engage with, or have been removed from, mainstream education. Many of our students carry significant trauma, anxiety, attachment difficulties or adverse childhood experiences. Some are young carers; some are looked-after or previously looked-after; some have safeguarding plans in place.

In this context, the mobile phone is rarely a neutral object. For our students, it can be a source of regulation and a source of dysregulation. It can be a lifeline home, and it can be a vehicle for bullying, county-lines exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse, image-sharing offences and self-harm content. Our job is to harness the protective function and remove the harm.

On 19 January 2026 the Department for Education updated its guidance “Mobile phones in schools”, stating that all schools should be mobile phone-free environments by default and that anything other than this should be by exception only. From January 2026, Ofsted considers the effectiveness of mobile phone policies as part of every school inspection. On 20 April 2026, the government announced that this expectation will be placed on a statutory footing through an amendment to the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill currently before Parliament.

This policy gives effect to that guidance across the Progress Arc network while exercising the flexibility the guidance expressly permits for students whose individual circumstances disability, medical condition, caring responsibilities, mental health need, or safeguarding context require a reasonable adjustment. We are an SEMH/AP setting; reasonable adjustments are not the exception in our cohort, they are the operating norm. This policy is therefore stricter than a typical mainstream policy in its default position, and more individualised in its application.

2. Legislative Framework

This policy has been drafted with regard to:

- DfE non-statutory guidance “Mobile phones in schools” (updated 19 February 2026), including the expectation that schools operate as mobile phone-free environments by default throughout the entire school day

- The proposed statutory amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (announced 20 April 2026) to give legal force to the DfE guidance. This policy is written to be compliant with the anticipated statutory duty when it commences; no further redrafting will be required on commencement.
- Ofsted Education Inspection Framework from January 2026, inspectors evaluate schools' mobile phone policies and their implementation at every inspection.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education including duties on online safety, peer-on-peer/child-on-child abuse, and filtering and monitoring.
- Behaviour in Schools (DfE statutory guidance).
- Education Act 1996, section 550ZA and the Schools (Specification and Disposal of Articles) Regulations 2012 search powers in respect of prohibited items.
- Equality Act 2010 duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students.
- Children and Families Act 2014 duty to support students with medical conditions and to have regard to the SEND Code of Practice.
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR in relation to imaging, recording, processing and storage of personal data.
- Online Safety Act 2023 in respect of harmful online content, illegal image sharing, cyberflashing and related offences.
- Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Protection of Children Act 1978 in respect of the making, possession or distribution of indecent images of children (including self-generated images).

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All students on roll at any Progress Arc site, at all times during the school day, including before registration, between lessons, breaktimes, lunchtimes, and during off-site educational activities, work experience placements, alternative timetable activities, therapy sessions and reintegration support.
- All staff (teaching, mentor, welfare, admin, leadership, supply and peripatetic) and all volunteers, contractors, governors, trustees and visitors on site.

- All personal mobile phones, smart watches, smart rings, smart glasses, fitness trackers with messaging functionality, wireless earbuds with live transcription or assistant features, handheld games consoles with internet or messaging capability, tablets brought from home, and any other personal device with the capability to send or receive messages, calls or notifications, or to record audio, video or images.
- All school-provided devices when used for personal communication beyond their authorised educational purpose.

The “school day” for the purposes of this policy means the period from the student’s arrival on site or at an off-site Progress Arc activity, until the student leaves site or is collected at the end of the timetabled day, inclusive of all breaks.

4. Definitions

In this policy:

- “Mobile phone” includes any handheld device capable of voice or video calls, SMS, instant messaging, mobile internet, or recording, regardless of network connectivity at the time.
- “Smart technology with similar functionality” includes any wearable, handheld or embedded device that can send or receive notifications or messages, or that can record audio, video or stills. This includes smart watches, smart rings, smart glasses, fitness trackers with messaging, voice-assistant earbuds, and modified gaming devices.
- “Reasonable adjustment” has the meaning given in section 20 of the Equality Act 2010.
- “Individual Device Plan” (IDP) is a documented, time-limited agreement permitting a specific named student to access a specific device for a specific purpose at specified times and locations, made by exception under section 8 of this policy.
- “Designated Safeguarding Lead” (DSL) and “Deputy DSL” have the meaning given in Keeping Children Safe in Education.

5. Policy Statement

Progress Arc is a mobile phone-free environment by default. Students must not use, access, hold, view or operate a mobile phone or other smart technology with similar functionality at any point during the school day, including lessons, transitions, breaks, lunch, intervention time, therapy time, and off-site activities.

All mobile phones and smart devices must be handed in at the start of the school day. Students are not permitted to carry their phones, store them in pockets or bags, or retain them on their person during the day. Switching a phone off, or placing it on silent inside a bag, does not satisfy this policy.

Where a student requires access to a device during the school day to meet a disability-related need, a medical need, a young-carer responsibility, a safeguarding need, or another individual circumstance, this will be arranged by exception through an Individual Device Plan (see section 8).

The default position therefore is: phone off, handed in, stored securely, returned at end of day. Exceptions are individual, evidenced, recorded, and reviewed.

6. Practical Arrangements

6.1 Arrival and hand-in

On arrival, every student hands their mobile phone and any smart device falling within section 3 to a designated member of staff (typically the duty welfare officer or engagement mentor at the entrance). The device is powered off in the student's presence and placed into the student's individually labelled, lockable phone pouch or numbered locker compartment. The pouch is locked or the locker is closed and secured. Students observe and confirm their own device being secured.

Hand-in is part of the morning meet-and-greet routine, not a punitive checkpoint. Staff use this transition as a relational, low-arousal opportunity to gauge the student's presentation and emotional state for the day.

6.2 Storage and security

Devices are held in secure, lockable storage in a staff-supervised area. Storage is the responsibility of the school. Access is limited to the headteacher, deputy headteacher, designated office staff and the DSL/DDSL. A register is kept of every device received, locked

and returned.

Progress Arc accepts responsibility for reasonable care of devices handed in under this policy. Where loss or damage occurs through staff negligence, the school will investigate under its complaints and insurance procedures. Students who refuse to hand devices in remove their device from the school's safekeeping arrangements and accept full personal responsibility for it; this does not, however, permit them to use or access the device on site see section 9.

6.3 Return at end of day

Devices are returned at the end of the timetabled day. Students sign for the return. Where a student is leaving site early (medical appointment, agreed reduced timetable, alternative provision activity off site) the device is returned at the point of departure. Where a student is collected by a known adult, devices may be released either to the student at the gate or to the adult, in accordance with the student's individual arrangements on file.

6.4 Off-site activities, trips, work experience and reintegration

On educational visits, enrichment trips, work experience and reintegration days at mainstream partner schools, students remain subject to this policy. Phones are collected at the meeting point at the start of the activity and held by a named lead member of staff. On residential or extended trips, students may be permitted supervised contact home at scheduled points, in line with the trip-specific protocol agreed by the headteacher.

6.5 Transport to and from school

We recognise that many of our students travel independently, on taxis arranged by the local authority, or on public transport, and that a phone is an important safety tool on the journey. Students may therefore carry a phone to and from school. The journey is not the school day. The phone must be powered off and secured on entry to the building, and may not be used on site.

7. Roles & Responsibilities

7.1 The Proprietor and Senior Leadership of Progress Arc

The Progress Arc proprietor has approved this policy and is responsible for ensuring it is implemented consistently across the network, reviewed annually, and updated promptly to reflect any change in statutory duty, including commencement of the relevant provisions of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

7.2 Headteachers

Each headteacher is responsible for the implementation of this policy in their school. Specifically, the headteacher:

- Ensures every student, parent and member of staff is aware of the policy and the reasons behind it.
- Authorises Individual Device Plans under section 8.
- Reviews compliance data (incidents, refusals, IDP register) at least termly.
- Ensures storage arrangements are safe, secure and operationally workable.
- Maintains a clear audit trail to evidence implementation for Ofsted inspection.
- Considers each confiscation on its individual merits, taking into account the student's age, SEND, mental health context and any safeguarding plan.

7.3 Designated Safeguarding Lead

The DSL ensures that any incident involving a mobile phone that raises a safeguarding concern is responded to in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education and the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. The DSL is informed of every incident involving:

- Suspected possession or sharing of nude or semi-nude images of a child.
- Suspected contact with individuals who may be exploiting, grooming or radicalizing a student.
- Bullying, harassment or threats communicated via a device.
- Content depicting violence, weapons, or drug supply.
- Recording of staff, students or premises for the purpose of intimidation, distribution or upload.
- Self-harm or suicide-related content viewed, shared or generated by a student.

7.4 Staff

All staff:

- Consistently enforce this policy without exception, in a calm and relational manner.
- Do not use their own mobile phones for personal reasons in front of students during the school day. Personal phones are kept in staff areas. Limited operational use (multi-factor authentication, school messaging app, photographing a student's work for the recording system, contacting parents, summoning support) is permitted; recreational use is not.
- Do not photograph or record students on personal devices. School-issued devices are used for any image-capture that is required for educational, safeguarding or evidential purposes, in line with the Data Protection Policy.
- Report all breaches of this policy via the school's behaviour logging system on the same day.

7.5 Students

Students are expected to:

- Hand in their device(s) at the start of every school day without prompting after the induction period.
- Refrain from using, accessing or attempting to retrieve their device during the school day.
- Treat the hand-in routine as a normal part of arriving at school.
- Raise any concerns about a device, its return, or a need to make urgent contact with home with a member of staff immediately.

7.6 Parents and carers

Parents and carers are asked to:

- Read and acknowledge this policy on admission and at the start of each academic year.
- Reinforce the policy at home and avoid messaging or calling their child's mobile during the school day.
- Contact the school office in the usual way if they need to pass an urgent message to their child during the school day. Messages will be passed on without delay.

- Inform the school of any change in circumstance medical, caring, safeguarding that may warrant an Individual Device Plan or a review of an existing one.

8. Reasonable Adjustments

The DfE guidance, the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014 each require us to consider individual circumstances. The cohort served by Progress Arc makes this consideration central rather than peripheral. We will not operate a blanket prohibition that disadvantages disabled students, students with medical conditions, young carers, or students whose mental health context makes a complete loss of contact with home untenable in the short term.

Where an adjustment is needed, it is recorded in an Individual Device Plan (IDP) which sets out:

1. The student's name, year group, EHCP status and key adults.
2. The specific reason an adjustment is needed (disability, medical condition, young carer responsibility, safeguarding context, transitional anxiety, other individual circumstance).
3. The supporting evidence (EHCP section, clinical letter, social care correspondence, family assessment, internal pastoral assessment).
4. The precise nature of the adjustment – which device, for what specific purpose, at which time(s) and in which location(s).
5. The named staff responsible for facilitating the adjustment.
6. The review date (no IDP runs for longer than one term without review).
7. Sign-off by the headteacher, with parental signature where appropriate.

Adjustments we will routinely consider
Disability and SEND

Where a student's disability including autism, ADHD, sensory processing differences, communication difficulties, or specific anxiety presentations means that access to a regulating tool, communication app or sensory app is necessary to enable them to access education, we will arrange this. The student will not be required to access this on their personal phone where

a school-provided alternative is workable. Where the personal device is the only viable option (for example, a bespoke communication app already configured to the student's needs), supervised access at agreed times and locations will be permitted.

Medical conditions

Where a student uses a phone-linked medical device for example continuous glucose monitoring for Type 1 diabetes – the student retains their phone for that medical purpose. The phone remains paired with the medical device and is kept in a way that allows alerts to be received. Non-medical use of the phone remains prohibited.

Young carers

Students with significant caring responsibilities may need scheduled contact with the person they care for. We will agree fixed contact windows (typically once at break and once at lunch) supervised from a private space normally the welfare office or head of year office. We will not require a young carer to lose all contact with their dependant for the length of the school day.

Safeguarding and mental health context

For some students for example those recently bereaved, those returning from a mental health crisis, those subject to ongoing risk assessment for self-harm or suicidality, those experiencing domestic abuse at home, those at the start of a placement after long-term school refusal a sudden total separation from their phone may itself escalate distress. In these cases, working with the DSL and any external professionals involved, a graduated, time-limited IDP will set out short check-in points, decreasing in frequency, with the aim of reaching full compliance with the default position.

Looked-after and previously looked-after children

Arrangements are made with the Virtual School Head, the social worker and the carer where appropriate, and recorded on the IDP. Contact arrangements ordered by a court or set out in a care plan will be facilitated.

What an IDP is not

An Individual Device Plan is not:

- A general permission to use a phone on site outside the specified purpose and time.
- Permanent. Every IDP has a review date and a planned trajectory, where appropriate,

towards the default position.

- A means of avoiding the hand-in routine. Devices subject to an IDP are still secured by the school outside the agreed access windows.
- Negotiable in the moment by the student. Adjustments are set in advance with the headteacher, not bargained for during the school day.

Reviewing IDPs

IDPs are reviewed at least termly and on any material change in circumstance. They form part of the student's pastoral record and are visible to the headteacher, DSL, SENCO, key staff and (subject to data protection) Ofsted on inspection. The IDP register is reviewed by the headteacher every half term to identify trends and inform whole-school practice.

9. Breaches

Breaches of this policy are managed under the Behaviour Policy, using the school's graduated, relational and restorative approach. The starting point is always de-escalation and a return to the expected Behaviour. Sanctions are proportionate, considered and trauma-informed.

Indicative sanctions

The following are indicative, not mechanical. Each incident is assessed on its facts, including the student's age, SEND, mental health context, any IDP in place, and any safeguarding plan. First breach in a half term: device confiscated for the remainder of the day. Reminder of expectations. Logged. No call home unless safeguarding-relevant.

Repeated breach: device confiscated for the remainder of the day. Conversation with the student and parents. Restorative meeting. Reset of expectations.

Persistent breach: device confiscated for the remainder of the day; parents required to collect the device in person; behaviour support plan reviewed.

Serious or safeguarding-relevant breach (e.g. recording of staff, sharing of indecent images, recording of another student in distress, contact with persons suspected of exploitation): immediate referral to DSL; police involvement considered; risk assessment updated; further sanctions in line with the Behaviour Policy up to and including suspension.

Confiscation

Staff have the statutory power under section 91 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to confiscate, retain or dispose of a student's property as a disciplinary penalty, provided they act lawfully and proportionately. Confiscation of a mobile phone or other device under this policy is lawful provided the policy is clearly breached. The law protects staff from liability for loss or damage to confiscated items where they have acted lawfully. Staff will consider proportionality, the student's individual circumstances, and whether a less restrictive response would achieve the same outcome.

Confiscated devices are stored securely and returned in line with the indicative sanctions above. The school does not access the contents of a confiscated device except where section 9.4 applies.

9.3 Searching

The headteacher, and any member of staff authorised by the headteacher, has the statutory power to search a student or their possessions where they have reasonable grounds to suspect the student is in possession of a prohibited item or any item identified in the school rules as an item that may be searched for. Mobile phones and other smart devices are identified in this policy as items that may be searched for where a student refuses to hand them in or where there is reasonable suspicion that a hidden device is being used in breach of this policy. Searches are conducted in accordance with the DfE "Searching, screening and confiscation" guidance and the school's Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy.

9.4 Examining the contents of a device

The contents of a student's phone or device may only be examined where the headteacher (or a deputy authorised by the headteacher) reasonably suspects that the device has been used to cause harm, disrupt teaching or break school rules, and where examination is justified and proportionate. Where there is reason to suspect the device contains indecent images of a child, staff will not view, copy or forward the images. The device will be secured and the police and DSL informed immediately, in line with the UK Council for Internet Safety guidance "Sharing nudes and semi-nudes".

10. Staff & Visitor Guidelines

Staff are expected to model the Behaviour we ask of students. Personal phones are not used in front of students for personal purposes during the school day. Limited operational use is permitted as described in section 7.4. Staff do not give students their personal phone number, do not communicate with students on personal devices or personal accounts, and do not connect with current or recently-left students on personal social media accounts. Staff use of personal devices is governed by the Acceptable Use of ICT Policy and the Staff Code of Conduct; breaches are managed under the disciplinary procedure.

Visitors are asked, at the point of signing in, to keep mobile phones on silent and to refrain from using them in student-facing areas. Photography and recording on site by visitors is prohibited except by prior written agreement with the headteacher. Contractors working in student areas are subject to the same expectations. Governors and trustees follow the staff expectations when on site in a school-facing capacity.

Appendix A – IDP Template

To be completed by the headteacher in conjunction with the SENCO, DSL and parent/carer.
Held on the student's record. Reviewed termly.

Student name	
Year group / EHCP status	
Site	
Date plan agreed	
Reason for adjustment	(disability / medical / young carer / safeguarding / mental health / other specify)
Supporting evidence	(EHCP section, clinical letter, social care correspondence, internal pastoral assessment)
Device(s) covered	
Specific purpose of access	
Permitted time(s) of day	
Permitted location(s) on site	
Supervising staff	
Storage arrangement outside permitted access	
Trajectory / planned reduction	(where appropriate, e.g. reducing check-ins from 3 to 2 to 1 per day across the half term)
Review date	
Headteacher signature	
Parent / carer signature	

