



Brownhills Ormiston Academy

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Principal: Mrs A Lloyd

7th July 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

Introducing mobile phone signal blocking pouches for all students from September 2025

This 5-page letter -

1. Explains the rationale
2. Gives an overview of how the initiative will be launched and rolled out

As part of our ongoing commitment to creating a focused and distraction-free learning environment, we are introducing mobile phone signal blocking pouches for all students from September 2025. These pouches are designed to securely store mobile phones during the school day, preventing access to calls, messages, apps and the internet whilst on academy site. Many schools in the UK are already operating the same policy and Tom Rees, the CEO of Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) is directing all 44 schools in the Trust to be mobile phone free by September 2026. Many OAT academies are launching this September, including us, so we are ready for the deadline.

Here is a link to an article in The Guardian from September 2024 in which Tom Rees explains further the rationale behind the Trust's decision, backed up by research:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/sep/13/academy-chain-with-35000-pupils-to-be-first-in-england-to-go-phone-free>

We understand that mobile phones are an important part of modern life, especially for communication before and after school. However, during school hours, they can be a significant distraction and can negatively impact learning, social interaction, behaviour and wellbeing.

You will already be aware that our academy behaviour policy prohibits the use of mobile phones during the school day- phones are to be 'not seen and not heard'. This plays an important role in the safeguarding of all our students and staff. More recently, there has been a growing awareness both in the UK and internationally of the potentially harmful effects of smartphones on young people's mental, physical and academic well-being, including:

- possible exposure to harmful online content
- challenges regarding behavioural addiction issues relating to devices/content



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- academic distraction affecting learning progress and attainment
- possible exposure to grooming activity
- incidents of cyber-bullying and unacceptable behaviour
- social media distractions
- the development of, and triggering of, mental illness, including anxiety and depression
- wasting time

Increasingly, many schools in the UK and around the world now have a total ban on mobile phones in schools, e.g. in Australia where phones have been banned from all schools for about a year with positive effects seen. This is well documented in the media.

Research and studies of the negative effects of mobile phone usage on young people

Evidence from studies recognises that social media can cause significant problems for student mental health and wellbeing. As a school, we also have concerns about how social media is impacting some students. The pressures faced by young people online are unique to their digital generation.

Social media addiction is a genuine concern, and research suggests that young people who are heavy users of social media (spending more than two hours per day on social networking sites) are more likely to report poor mental health, including symptoms of anxiety and depression. Talking to our students, they regularly share that they spend a lot longer than two hours a day on their phones! The unrealistic expectations set by social media may leave young people with feelings of self-consciousness, low self-esteem and the pursuit of perfectionism, which can manifest as anxiety disorders.

Instances of online bullying are unfortunately common amongst young people in society and are made worse due to social media, group chats and mobile phones. We work closely with our local policing team in Walsall, and they have raised concerns about the level of online abuse amongst some young people nowadays. By removing mobile phones, we can create a safe space where our students are protected from cyber-bullying and the distractions of apps and the internet, whilst enjoying face-to-face relationships with friends and removing associated worry, anxiety, and depression.



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Covert use of mobile phones by some students on our site

Unfortunately, we know that despite the rigour of our behaviour policy, some students are choosing to covertly use mobile phones on our site, and on occasions, this has negatively affected both students and staff, which is time consuming and upsetting. We have been made aware of occasions when some students have covertly taken photos and videos of other students and staff whilst on our site. We have no control over mobile phones, and the harm they can cause, if students choose to use them in this covert way and in areas like toilet cubicles.

It is very time consuming and stressful for staff to investigate negative incidents related to student mobile phone usage that have either occurred on our site or off site. Most often it is impossible to resolve, and beyond our capability and jurisdiction to resolve. Staff should be using their time to support the educational needs of our students, and this initiative will support staff to focus on the right things, which serves to benefit all our students.

How the pouches work

- Each student will be issued a personal signal-blocking pouch (a pouch with a strong magnetic lock which, once closed, can only be opened with a specially designed unlocking magnet).
- The use of the signal-blocking pouch is non-negotiable.
- Students will always be in possession of their devices – there are no lockboxes to leave them in, and they are not confiscated.
- Upon arrival to school, students will be required to place their phone in their pouch and seal it.
- The pouch will remain sealed throughout the school day and can only be unlocked at the end of the day, accessing an unlocking device, which we will make available.
- The pouches do not damage the phones in any way, and we are being supplied by a reputable company: Lockerspace.co.uk.

Further information about the pouches

- The academy will pay for the first pouch issued to each student.
- The academy is currently reviewing its behaviour policy and will be updating it to include consequences if students lose their pouch or fail to put their phones in their pouch.



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- The pouches are very robust and the SLT have researched the best product that suits the needs of our academy

Students who require their phone for confirmed medical diagnosis, e.g. diabetes blood checks

- Students who use their phones as a device to check or record information related to a confirmed medical diagnosis will be given a pouch, which is designed to be locked and unlocked by the user.
- We will discuss each student's medical diagnosis with parents and carers.
- We will continue any current arrangements that we have in place to support individual students with medical diagnosis that requires checks until we have discussed arrangements with the affected students and their parents/carers.

How can parents communicate with their child? How can a child communicate with their parents?

- Students will still have access to their devices before and after school hours, when off site.
- Whilst on site, the focus for students is academic learning, so we kindly request that parents and carers allow their child to follow the activities of the academy day.
- If your child needs to be picked up early, or there's a matter that cannot wait until the end of the school day, and parents/carers must communicate with academy staff, they are to contact main reception for assistance. The most appropriate member of staff will be asked to assist.
- Students can speak to any adult on site. If there is an issue or matter that students are concerned about, they are to speak to a member of staff. Staff will make contact with parents and carers, if they feel it is necessary to support a child. They will use their professional judgement.

What if there is an emergency?

- Parents and carers should contact main reception.
- The academy will communicate directly with families wherever needed.
- Students are encouraged to always report to a member of staff in the first instance if they become unwell or experience an issue at the academy. This is so staff can provide the most appropriate support and contact parents and carers, if necessary.

Compliance



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Refusal to comply will result in immediate placement in internal isolation until the student complies.

- Dishonesty (e.g. carrying a phone outside the pouch or using a decoy phone) will be treated as a serious breach of conduct, the most serious level in the academy's behaviour policy.
- The academy detention system will be used as required to issue sanctions for non-compliance.
- Repeated breaches may result in suspension or in the most serious cases, permanent exclusion.

Confiscation and return of devices

- If a phone is seen or heard on site, it will be confiscated immediately.
- Confiscated phones will **not** be returned to students directly.
- A parent or carer must attend a meeting with a senior staff member to retrieve the device. This will be at a designated time convenient for the school.
- Parents that arrive unannounced without a pre-arranged meeting will not be accommodated and will be directed to leave the site. All parents must adhere to the school visitor policy or run the risk of being banned from the site in line with DfE guidance.

We believe this initiative will support our students in developing positive and healthy habits around mobile phone use, will keep them safe and will help them make the most of their time at school, especially concerning their academic learning and progress.

We appreciate your support in helping us maintain a productive and respectful learning environment.

We will be in touch with further information. Thank you for your continued cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs A Lloyd

Principal