1.   Introduction

At Longbenton High School we are seeking to create a distinctive culture with respect to mobile phone use and screens - one which intentionally limits and restricts mobile phone use in order to limit distractions to learning, prioritise deeper knowledge and help improve face to face relationships.

We have long had a mobile phone rule - that phones are off and away. However, over time, we have been seeing them creep back into everyday usage, with some students deliberately disregarding this rule, or using them in toilets. We have also seen an increase in parents feeling the need to constantly 'check in' and students feeling the corresponding pressure to respond. As technology has moved on - eg airpods - students can be discreetly accessing phones in plain sight. This policy therefore makes a distinctive change - from 'no phone visible' to 'phone free'.

We believe that smartphones with unrestricted internet access and social media are not suitable for children under 16 - a simple 'brick' phone does everything a child needs. We want to help minimise the impact of smartphones on the lives of our young people. Given that on average, children receive over 200 notifications a day, it is no wonder they are twitching to check TikTok in toilets or sneak a few minutes on SnapChat regardless of sanctions. We need to help and support our young people to manage this pressure.

This document will have consideration for the following legislation and guidance: • Education and Inspections Act 2006 • DfE 2024 'Keeping children safe in education' • DfE 2024 "Mobile phones in schools: Guidance for schools on prohibiting the use of mobile phones throughout the school day".

This document operates in conjunction with the following: • Behaviour Policy • Anti-Bullying Policy • Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy • Searching, Screening & Confiscation Protocol.

2.   Rationale

- There has been an explosion of mental illness in Generation Z, the generation that grew up with smartphones. Multiple studies from across the world have found a correlation between teen depression, anxiety and excessive smartphone use.

- We know that the research basis tells us:

    1. Smartphones are linked to anxiety and depression (see the research basis on 3 below).

    2. Smartphones expose children to extreme safeguarding risks (UK children are being exposed to violent and sexual imagery, grooming, cyberbullying and sexting).

    3. Smartphones impair attainment (they are designed to distract attention and increase dependency; schools which ban phones have higher exam outcomes).

- As teachers and school leaders, we have dealt with countless negative situations involving the use of smartphones and social media amongst the student population. Students are bringing their phone-based behaviour patterns into school, which is causing classroom conflict, cyberbullying and distraction from learning.

- Children spend more time in school than in any other place outside their home; we have a duty to protect them from harmful influences via smartphones.

- We have the ability to move faster than the government to effect change. The [government issued new school guidance](#) on smartphones in February but stopped short of issuing an outright ban.

- We want to build the resilience of our students. It has come to our attention that, despite phones being banned in school already, some students are calling parents and / or carers at times during the school day to discuss friendship issues or even something that may have happened in a classroom. There has been a rise in the number of occasions parents have arrived at school to discuss an incident or collect a student having spoken to their child rather than a member of staff before we even know about it, which undermines the authority and trust of staff within the school to deal with issues as they arise.

3.   Research basis

In Britain, [24% of 5-7 year olds now own a smartphone;](#) by the age of 12, 97% do. When parents started first giving smartphones to their children, we didn't know the impact this would have. Now, there is a much wider research and evidence basis for the negative impact of smartphones on young people. The average amount of screen time for a young person is 8 hours per day. Too much screen time can have significant detrimental effects on young people's wellbeing such as increased anxiety, poor sleep patterns, poor self-esteem, and mood swings. The recommended screen time is 2 hours per day and research suggests there is a dose-response relationship, meaning the less time spent in front of a screen, the smaller the detrimental effect will be.

Key evidence:

- (UK) In the last three years, the [likelihood of a young person having a mental health issues has increased by 50%](#) and emergency referrals to youth mental healthcare services have [risen by 53%.](#)
  This has been strongly correlated with smartphone use.
- (UK) The [Millennium Cohort Study](#) states that 'greater social media use relates to poor sleep, low self-esteem and poor body image'
- (Intl) The world-renowned PISA study has documented the rise of loneliness amongst school children which doubled between 2012-2018. Analysis of the data demonstrates that school loneliness was high when smartphone access and internet use were high.
  https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197121000853

- (US) Mental health researchers Jonathan Haidt and Jean Twenge via The Anxious Generation have observed that symptoms of depression among teens increased sharply in 2012, coinciding with the acceleration of smartphone ownership particularly among those younger generations[1].
- (Switzerland) Excessive smartphone use is associated with psychiatric, cognitive, emotional, medical and brain changes in adolescents that should be considered by health and education professionals.
- (Norway) After smartphone bans in 400+ middle schools, girls had fewer mental health issues, better grades, and both girls and boys were less likely to be bullied.
- (US) The younger someone gets a mobile phone, the worse their mental health in later life (Sapien Labs).
- (UK) In recent studies, 55% of UK teens reported seeing real life acts of violence on social media in the last 12 months. 24% had seen children carrying, promoting, or using weapons. Youth Endowment Fund
- (UK) Children's commissioner report, Rachel De Souza: "In a room of 15 and 16-year-olds, three quarters had been sent a video of a beheading. I conducted a nationally representative survey of 2,005 children and their parents to understand families' perspectives on online safety. My survey found that children are frequently exposed to a wide range of inappropriate and harmful content online, included sexualised and violent imagery, anonymous trolling, and material promoting suicide, self-harm and eating disorders."
- (UK) Social media algorithms amplify misogynistic content
- (UK) Social media has been proven to increase self-harm and suicidal tendencies amongst adolescents. ONS Report: 1 in 5 children between the ages of 10 and 15 had experienced some form of cyberbullying within the last year.
- https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Disconnect.pdf (UK) Children from schools that have an outright ban on smartphones achieve GCSE results one to two grades higher compared with those at schools with laxer policies. Those schools are also twice as likely to be rated Outstanding by Ofsted.
- (US) Research paper: smartphone addiction has negative impacts on student learning and overall academic performance.
- (Intl) Multiple studies have identified evidence of comorbidities between excessive smartphone use and psychiatric diagnoses including ADHD and OCD.
- (Intl) 'Put learners first': Unesco calls for global ban on smartphones in schools

---

[1] For a digestible run down of Haidt's data and evidence on the mental health crisis in adolescents, watch the Smartphone Free Childhood webinar with him on You Tube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEZHSxg3Nw0

4. **Our acceptable use guidance**

Summary of rules and expectations in our school:

- **Smartphones and mobile phones are banned on the school premises at Longbenton High School. They are handed in each day and returned at the end of afternoon form time.**
   📄 **Student FAQs - Mobile Phones**

- **Our phone policy is 'phone free' - that is, students do not carry their phone with them while at school. This is much clearer than 'off and away' and avoids grey areas.**

- **Smartphones are a banned item in our behaviour policy.**

- **Staff are asked to use phones in staffrooms, offices and workspaces only. We would encourage all staff as a professional courtesy not to use phones in meetings.**

We expect pupils to act in good faith and in keeping with this policy by handing in their phone each day, and we expect parents to help enforce adherence to this policy. We reserve the right periodically to perform searches in keeping with the school's protocols. Further infringements of this policy will lead to an escalation of sanctions in accordance with our Behaviour Policy. See also our 📄 Searching, Screening and Confiscation Protocol - Pastoral Le…

5. **Filtering and monitoring**

The school has appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place to protect pupils from accessing or creating inappropriate or harmful content while working on school owned and managed devices connected to the school's network. We monitor pupil's use of internet services and electronic devices (e.g. Chromebooks) in keeping with the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education. For more information about the school's approach to filtering and monitoring see our Safeguarding Policy.

6. **Other devices**

General rule: no personal electronic devices for students. Students are not permitted to bring personal electronic devices to the school; this applies, but is not limited, to personal laptop computers/tablet computers, smartwatches, Kindles, cameras, music players and gaming devices.. See our Uniform Policy for more information about wearable technology.

Appendices

A. Media coverage/school case studies

— (UK) How banning mobile phones has boosted 'good old-fashioned human interaction' at Kilgraston School in Perthshire
https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/education/schools/4136146/kilgraston-school-perthshire-mobile-phone-ban/

— (UK) Mobiles in schools: Accrington students embrace phone-free days - BBC News
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-68428713

— (UK) The school offering a 12-hour day to break phone addiction
https://www.thetimes.com/uk/article/school-to-extend-day-to-12-hours-to-break-pupils-phone-addiction-f5cjdhqrz

— (UK) Conwy secondary school's 'phone-free' policy sees success | North Wales Pioneer
https://www.northwalespioneer.co.uk/news/24098094.conwy-secondary-schools-phone-free-policy-sees-success/

— (UK) The extraordinary results of one school's ban on smartphones
https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-extraordinary-results-of-one-schools-ban-on-smartphones/

— (US) This School Took Away Smartphones. The Kids Don't Mind. - WSJ
https://www.wsj.com/articles/this-school-took-away-smartphones-the-kids-dont-mind-11667614444

B. Smartphone Free Childhood

As noted above, the evidence is mounting that there are serious risks to healthy childhood development associated with screen use, and that these risks have been dramatically intensified by the incessant internet access made possible because of smartphones. Given the risks associated with screen use, our recommendation is that children not have a smartphone until at least age 14. As noted above, where parents adopt a common approach it makes it easier for other families. Toward that end, we encourage all parents to support the Smartphone Free Childhood movement. You can sign up on their website and receive periodic updates. https://parentpactresults.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/tyneandwear You can sign the pact for our school here:
https://parentpactresults.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/tyneandwear#longbentonhighschoollongbenton

We recognise that most LHS parents, as per the wider social norm, have already given a smartphone to their child. Where this is the case, we strongly urge all parents to make use of parent control software to regulate screen time and screen content. We recognise that many proactive parents, with the support of such tools, have helped their teenage children manage smartphones effectively.

C. Online Risks and Useful Links for Parents

It is vital that parents: ● take an interest in online activity and be aware of what your child is doing online, ● talk to children about online risks and how to manage them, ● be aware of trends in online activity generally.

One helpful way to summarise risks from screen-based activity is the **4 Cs:**

Content: Being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful content (e.g. pornography, fake news, racism, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, antiSemitism, radicalisation and extremism);

Contact: Being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users (e.g. peer pressure, commercial advertising, and adults posing as children or young adults with the intention to groom and/or exploit them for sexual, criminal, financial or other purposes);

Conduct: A pupil's personal online behaviour that can increase the likelihood of, or cause, harm (e.g. making, sending and receiving explicit images such as consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes and/or pornography), sharing other explicit images, and online bullying;

Commerce: Risks such as online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing and or financial scams.

Parents should be aware of and enforce the **age limits** for setting up one's own social media account:
● Facebook: 13 years old ● Instagram: 13 years old ● Tiktok: 13 years old ● Snapchat: 13 years old ● WhatsApp: 16 years old

Parents should also be aware of the following risks:

Online sexual harrassment and sexual abuse: Sexting is the sharing of indecent photos intended to make a person appear more grown up or sexually appealing. It is important to emphasise that once an image is sent, the sender loses control over it. It is illegal to hold or share indecent photos of anyone under age 18; those who do so can be registered as sex offenders. Upskirting is also illegal. It is taking a sexually intrusive picture taken up a person's skirt or under their clothing. See our Safeguarding Policy for more information about child-on-child abuse.

Sexual exploitation: One form of online exploitation is grooming. Grooming is persuading or enticing others to act in a way they were not intending to. There can be various motives, including sexual exploitation. Those intent on exploitation will often operate under a false identity. It can take place through social media or gaming platforms. It can lead to a child sharing too much information, including contact details or location sharing, direct contact via webcams, or agreeing to meet in person.

Extremism and radicalisation: Extremism has been defined as vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. It also includes calls for the death of armed service personnel serving at home or overseas. Radicalisation is the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

Useful Links for Parents

Parent Control Software: Qustodio; Family Link; Net Nanny; Family Time

General resources for parents:

Thinkuknow (run by CEOP, Child Exploitation and Online Protection)
https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/

Parent Protect https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/internet-safety.htm

Common Sense Media https://www.commonsensemedia.org/videos/5-internet-safety-tips-for-kids

Safer Internet https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers

Childnet https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/

Parentzone https://parentzone.org.uk/

Internet Matters https://www.internetmatters.org/

Ask About Games https://www.askaboutgames.com/

Fight the new drug (The harms of pornography) https://fightthenewdrug.org/