

Good afternoon

As promised, I just wanted to give you, our parents and carers, a progress update on where we are with our mobile phone free school initiative and to share how we intend to further strengthen and support your child in maximising academic, emotional and social development opportunities available to them in OLSB Catholic Academy.

As you are aware, we took the decision to become a mobile phone free school back in September, when we launched a research informed initiative that provided and facilitated a deliberate disconnect with mobile phones and harmful social media exposure for our young people during their school day.

After a recent progress review of this initiative, in which all stakeholder views were considered, I wanted to make you aware of our successes to date, and share with you how we intend to further develop and strengthen our strategy moving forward.

When we launched the initiative back in September, the main intention, was to control and minimise, on behalf of our young people, the adverse effects of mobile phone addiction and social media over reliance.

It was also driven by a genuine desire, to provide a supportive, safe, as well as stress free, phone free environment, for every member of our school community, with the expectation that we all, without exception, buy in.

And for parents and carers, we wanted to do something tangible to support you in teaching and developing within your child, safe and healthy mobile phone and social media usage and accessibility routines, which in turn, support your child's learning, safety, mental health and well-being, during the school day.

By removing the distraction of mobile phones, we want to ensure your child is exposed to activities that actively develop and promote positive mental, emotional, and physical health, thereby enhancing their overall happiness, quality of life and academic performance.

As a school, we are proud to be pioneers in terms of this important work, but even we didn't realise how much traction talk of banning mobile phones in schools would have beyond OLSB.

The associated dangers of unregulated social media platform exposure are highlighted on an almost daily basis in news reports and more recently, through television dramas. The topic of mobile phone over usage and the harmful effects that has on children, has gathered momentum, not only in the media, but also in the political domain.

Our young people are dealing with contemporary issues 24/7 issues that we didn't have to deal with when we were young. Unregulated social media platforms and sites, fake news, cyber bullying, and other malign influences are having a detrimental effect on children and we must do something about this as a society.

We are proud to have stepped up to the parapet to support and safeguard the healthy development of our young people when they are in school.

We have trailblazed in this crucial area and our pioneering decision to actively and tangibly support the formation of your child's social, emotional and academic development by utilising and investing in the Yondr pouch system has undoubtedly brought about a positive culture shift in a number of related areas of your child's development.

I am so proud of the way the vast majority of pupils have embraced the many positive aspects and opportunities, attending a mobile phone free school presents.

For the vast majority, mobile phones no longer get in the way of their learning, no longer stifle their exposure to new experiences, no longer compete for their attention during a school day or limit their opportunities. Pupil voice tells us that the majority of pupils see, appreciate and are benefitting from these positive spin offs and welcome the reduction in harmful exposure to social media reliance. But don't take my word for it.

The raft of evidence, research and feedback from the vast majority of parents, carers, staff and pupils, points unanimously to the success of our mobile phone, social media free school policy. The tiny minority of pupils who try to circumnavigate the systems associated with facilitating a mobile phone free school need to come into line with the vast majority.

To that end, the following adaptations will be made to our initiative, to secure and streamline compliance, to support the wider school community (staff and parent/carers) and to support the academic, social and emotional development of your every child. The intention is that the following adaptations also provide a secure and safe working environment for all staff and pupils and I will share with you now the rationale behind adaptations so that we can work together in partnership to get this right for all

- Due to a tiny minority of pupils not following policy, the parental option to opt out of our pouch system will be taken away to support consistency, fairness for all and to ensure manageable compliance.
- To support this, all pupils will be assigned and allocated their own numbered and trackable pouch free of charge this week. While this is a huge investment on the school's part, we feel your child's happiness, well-being and success is worth investing in, and we ask that all parents and carers, without exception, work in partnership with us to ultimately support and develop your child, but also to support the development, safety and wellbeing of the whole school community – staff and pupils.
- The expectation is that your child will be responsible for looking after their free pouch which school will provide for their use during their 5 years with us. While the first pouch is free, if a child loses or damages their pouch, the expectation is that the £18 replacement fee is paid by parents and carers and your child will receive a replacement pouch.
- Every morning during form time, pupils will display their pouch which contains their phone, as part of the existing equipment checks carried out by tutors. This is for auditing, safeguarding

and compliance purposes. Random spot checks will also be made to ensure compliance from all pupils. So if you as a parent / carer choose for your child to leave their mobile phone at home, please note that your child will be regularly asked to show their pouch for auditing purposes and on the final day of every half term, we will do a full audit of all pouches to ensure all pouches remain in good working order to ensure the initiative is financially sustainable moving forward and that future generations coming into school can benefit.

- If a child says they have forgotten their pouch, to ensure community compliance, the parent/carer will be contacted and the expectation will be that the parent/carer brings the pouch to main reception. Clearly, we recognise the inconvenience this would cause parents and carers, as well as our staff, so we urge you to speak to your child about the importance of organisation and remembering to bring their pouch to school every day along with other learning ready equipment, to minimise any inconvenience to you and staff within OLSB.
- Given the schools financial investment in this initiative, if your child is found to have wilfully damaged or lost their allocated pouch, parents/carers will be billed and a replacement pouch provided to ensure their child complies with school policy and comes to school with the required equipment to take an active and positive part in learning. Given the tight financial constraints families and schools are working within, please have the conversation with your child around the importance of looking after supplied equipment and the absolute expectation that deliberate loss or wilful damage cannot and will not be tolerated.
- Tighter compliance monitoring will secure and maintain safeguarding consistency and will provide assurances to all staff and pupils. It will also eradicate the temptation for any child, to disregard school policy and partake in any negative, anti-social mobile phone usage opportunities including recording during the school day which could have

a harmful or negative effect on a member of staff or another child.

- As discussed, and as a deterrent to any non-compliance with policy, if your child is caught in school with a mobile phone not secured in a pouch, it will be confiscated immediately, locked in our safe, and the parent/carer will be expected to pick up the mobile phone during the school office hours of 8-4pm. A detention sanction will also be issued to your child and if they choose to develop a pattern of not following our pouch policy, escalation of sanctions will follow but we hope that the escalation of sanctions won't be necessary and ask that parents and carers support and work with us to ensure 100% compliance.
- There will be some rare exceptions, where adaptations will need to be made to support pupils with medical needs or caring responsibilities, but such limited adaptations will be supported and brokered on an individual basis between home and the Deputy Headteacher, Mr Pinnock.

We will continue to support your child's holistic development and to keep OLSB a social media, mobile phone free, safe space, where pupils are free from distraction, the negative impact of FOMO and cyber bullying, and we reduce the mental health and anxiety issues associated with social media and mobile phones.

And I want to finish by once again saying how incredibly proud we are of the way the vast majority of our pupils have adapted to revised and new routines around their mobile phone usage.

Children are trying new things as well as communicating and having face to face conversations with each other. They are increasing their resilience and confidence levels and as our pupil leaders shared, undoubtedly the social, emotional and academic benefits will support the successful development and formation of your child for years to come. This is why we are so passionate about ensuring, every child who comes to OLSB, gets the opportunity to flourish in a mobile free learning environment and

this is also why school and home need to continue to work together for the common good.

We have a moral duty to help and support young people navigate safely the changing world in which they live and operate, and our mobile phone free school policy will go a long way in supporting your child in securing that safe navigation.

I thank you in advance for your support and ask you to continue to work in partnership with school to keep OLSB a mobile phone free school for the good of your child, my staff and every child in our care.