

UNITY ACADEMY

Portable Digital Devices and Mobile Phones Policy

Policy and procedures for pupil use of mobile phones, smart technology and other personal digital devices

Effective from	September 2026
Review date	September 2027
Applies to	Unity Academy - Nursery to Year 11
Supersedes	Portable Digital Devices Policy 2023-26

Key expectation: Unity Academy is a mobile phone-free environment during the school day. Secondary pupils must secure mobile phones and included personal digital devices in their phone pouch from 8:15am until 3:30 pm, or until the end of any after-school detention.

1. Purpose and principles

Unity Academy aims to provide a calm, safe and distraction-free environment in which pupils can learn, socialise and develop positive habits. This policy sets out clear expectations for mobile phones, smart technology and other personal digital devices and supports the academy's Ready, Respectful, Safe (RRS) culture.

The academy has regard to the Department for Education's statutory guidance on mobile phones in schools, which schools are expected to follow from 1 September 2026. The default position is that pupils do not have access to mobile phones or similar smart technology during the school day, including lessons, movement time, break and lunch.

2. Scope

For the purposes of this policy, "personal digital devices" include, but are not limited to:

- mobile phones and smartphones;
- smartwatches or other wearable devices capable of messaging, calling, receiving notifications or recording;
- earphones, earbuds, AirPods and personal headphones;
- personal tablets, games devices and similar connected technology; and
- any other personal device with communication, recording or smart functionality that the academy determines is covered by this policy.

School-owned devices used as part of teaching and learning are not covered by the prohibition when used under staff direction. Any approved Bring Your Own Device arrangement must be explicitly authorised by the academy and does not include mobile phones.

3. Expectations for Nursery and Primary pupils

- Nursery and Primary pupils should not bring a mobile phone or other personal smart device to school unless there is a specific, agreed need.
- Where a device is authorised, it must remain switched off and stored in the location or manner directed by the academy for the whole school day.
- Pupils must not access, use, photograph, record, message or communicate through a personal device during the school day unless specifically authorised as an exceptional arrangement.

4. Expectations for Years 7-11: Phone Pouch System

All pupils in Years 7-11 are expected to bring their academy-issued phone pouch to school every day. The pouch is part of the academy's required daily equipment.

1. Before or on arrival at school, pupils must switch their mobile phone to off or silent mode and place it, together with covered personal devices such as earbuds/AirPods, in their phone pouch.
2. The pouch must be locked by 8:15am and remain locked until 3:15pm. Where a pupil has an after-school detention, the expectation continues until the detention has finished.
3. Pupils retain possession of the locked pouch during the day but must not attempt to open, damage, bypass or tamper with it.
4. At the end of the school day, pupils may unlock their pouch at the academy's designated unlocking points.
5. A pupil arriving late must secure their device before leaving Student Support/Reception. A pupil leaving early may unlock their pouch through Student Support/Reception as part of the signing-out process.
6. If a pupil forgets, loses or has a damaged pouch, the device must be handed to Student Support on arrival or a temporary arrangement must be followed. Pupils must not carry an unsecured device around school.
7. Lost or deliberately damaged pouches may need to be replaced. The academy will communicate replacement arrangements with parents/carers.

5. Contact during the school day

Parents/carers who need to contact a pupil during the school day should contact the academy through Reception on 01253 355493. Where a pupil needs to contact home urgently, staff will facilitate this through the academy's communication systems.

The academy will make reasonable arrangements for genuine emergencies. Pupils should not use an unlocked personal phone to manage routine communication during the school day.

6. Breaches of the policy and sanctions

The academy expects calm, immediate compliance. Where a phone or covered device is seen, heard or accessed during prohibited times, the pupil will be instructed to comply with the policy. Refusal or repeated non-compliance will be managed under the Behaviour Policy.

- A pupil may be directed to Student Support until they comply with the policy.
- A device may be confiscated where this is a reasonable and proportionate response under the academy's behaviour arrangements.
- Parents/carers may be informed and, for repeated or serious breaches, asked to discuss the matter with the academy.
- Sanctions may be escalated where a pupil refuses a reasonable instruction, damages or bypasses a pouch, uses a concealed device, or uses a device in a way that creates a safeguarding, bullying or behaviour concern.

The aim of sanctions is to restore the mobile phone-free environment quickly and consistently, not to create lengthy disputes about devices.

7. Reasonable adjustments and exceptional arrangements

Unity Academy recognises that a small number of pupils may require an individual adjustment or exception. Any arrangement will be considered case by case, documented and limited to what is necessary. Examples may include:

- a disability or medical need;
- a SEND-related need where a reasonable adjustment is required;
- a safeguarding plan or specific risk-management arrangement;
- a young carer or other exceptional family circumstance; or
- another circumstance agreed by a senior leader.

An adjustment does not automatically mean unrestricted access to a phone. The academy will agree the safest and least disruptive arrangement with the pupil and parent/carer, involving the SENDCO, DSL or other relevant professionals where appropriate.

8. Searching, confiscation and examination of devices

Any search, confiscation or examination of a personal device will be carried out in accordance with the law, the academy's Behaviour Policy and the Department for Education's Searching, screening and confiscation guidance. Staff will not routinely search the contents of a device merely because it has been seen or used.

Where there is a lawful basis to examine data or files - for example because of a safeguarding concern, suspected prohibited item, serious misconduct or suspected criminal activity - the academy will follow the relevant legal and safeguarding procedures. Material may be retained, deleted or passed to the police or another agency only where this is lawful and appropriate.

9. Photography, filming, audio recording and online conduct

- Pupils must not use a personal device to photograph, film or audio-record pupils, staff, lessons or the academy environment during the school day unless this has been expressly authorised for an educational purpose.
- Pupils must not use personal technology to bully, harass, threaten, humiliate, impersonate or target another member of the school community.
- Online behaviour outside school may be addressed by the academy where it affects the safety or welfare of pupils or staff, disrupts the orderly running of the academy, or is otherwise within the academy's lawful behaviour and safeguarding responsibilities.
- Any suspected safeguarding or illegal content will be referred promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and, where appropriate, to the police or other relevant agencies.

10. Staff responsibilities and role modelling

- All staff are expected to apply this policy consistently and calmly.
- Staff should avoid using personal mobile phones for personal reasons in front of pupils during the school day. Legitimate work use - such as multi-factor authentication, issuing rewards/sanctions, safeguarding or other authorised operational purposes - may be appropriate.
- Staff must follow safeguarding, data-protection and acceptable-use requirements when using any device for academy business.

11. Parents/carers

Parents/carers are asked to support the academy by:

- reinforcing that Unity is a mobile phone-free environment during the school day;
- ensuring secondary pupils bring their phone pouch every day and understand that covered devices must be secured;
- using Reception rather than contacting pupils directly during the school day;
- supporting reasonable school sanctions where the policy is breached; and
- working with the academy where an individual adjustment is genuinely required.

12. Loss, damage and security

Personal devices are brought onto academy premises at the owner's risk. Pupils remain responsible for looking after their device and pouch. The academy cannot accept responsibility for loss, theft or accidental damage to personal devices except where responsibility arises under law. Where the academy takes temporary possession of a device, staff will take reasonable care of it while it is held.

13. Trips, visits and activities outside the normal school day

The academy may prohibit, restrict or permit devices on trips, residential visits and activities outside the normal school day according to the educational purpose, safeguarding needs and practical arrangements of the activity. Expectations will be communicated in advance where they differ from this policy.

14. Monitoring and review

The academy will monitor the consistency and impact of this policy through behaviour and safeguarding information, staff and pupil feedback, parental communication and routine leadership review. The policy will normally be reviewed annually, or earlier if statutory guidance, legislation or academy practice changes.

15. Related policies and guidance

- [Department for Education - Mobile phones in schools \(statutory guidance, updated 29 June 2026\)](#)
- [Department for Education - Searching, screening and confiscation in schools](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026](#)
- Unity Academy Behaviour Policy
- FCAT Online Safeguarding Policy
- Unity Academy Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Relevant FCAT data protection and acceptable-use requirements

Publication note: This policy replaces the Portable Digital Devices Policy 2023-26 published on the Unity Academy website and reflects the academy's current phone pouch arrangements and statutory mobile-phone guidance in force for the 2026-27 academic year.