Carwarden House School – March 2025

Updated guidance and requirements in relation to students' mobile devices in school (including smartphones, tablets and smartwatches).

In line with clear DfE guidance, Carwarden House School has a duty to create an environment that is calm, safe and free from distraction so all our students, whatever their background, can learn and thrive. One of the greatest challenges facing schools is the presence of smartphones and other mobile devices, such as smartwatches or tablets, that connect to the internet.

Reducing distraction

The presence and use in school of these devices risks unnecessary distraction, disruption and diversion in the classroom. We owe it to our students to do what we can to remove distractions and enable them to be fully present and engaged in the classroom. Research shows that if a child or young person has such a device on them they are highly likely to be distracted as they check notifications, even if they are not communicating with others.

Keeping students safe

We also owe it to our students to keep them safe at school.

The DfE reports that one in five pupils have experienced bullying online. By removing all smart devices from the school day, we can create a safe space where students are protected from the risks and dangers associated with social media and cyber-bullying, as well as the peer pressure and possible stigma associated with owning what are often expensive devices.

Three in ten pupils nationally say making and maintaining friendships and their mental health are both causes of worry, anxiety or depression. By removing smartphones and other devices connected to the internet in school, children and young people can spend more time staying active and socialising face-to-face with their peers, activities which have a positive impact on their wellbeing. We believe our school can help children and young people develop these habits, which will in turn help them thrive outside of school.

Like smartphones, many tablets and smartwatches have features like cameras and GPS. The ability to take photos or record videos of others without their permission can pose serious privacy issues and potentially place students at risk.

And whilst GPS might help reassure parents they know where their child is, there is no need for this whilst their child is in school – they know exactly where their child is! Also, it is now apparent that GPS information from mobile devices can be 'hacked' and potentially used to place children & young people at risk of serious harm.

Cheating

Similar to smartphones, smartwatches can facilitate cheating during tests and exams, as students can access information quickly or communicate discreetly. Exam boards already prohibit smartwatches being worn in any test or examination.

Rules

All our students understand the rules about bringing their smartphones to school - they are switched off and handed in to their Tutor on arrival, stored securely during the day and returned at home time. Phones not handed in may be confiscated and returned only when the student's parents come to the school to collect it.

A Fitbit or similar gadget that counts steps only is fine, but any smartwatches/device that can send/receive calls or messages/notifications or take photographs is treated the same as a smartphone and is not allowed to be used on site and must be left at home or handed in.

Smartwatches are not permitted to be worn during the school day, either on or off-site.

Our rules are in line with the DfE guidance (February 2024) – see below.

Conclusion

Today's children and young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world, living their lives on and offline. This presents many exciting opportunities – but also challenges. By prohibiting smartphones and similar devices in school, we believe we can create a safe and calm environment free from distraction so all students can receive the education they deserve.

Resources

DfE policy & guidance:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65cf5f2a4239310011b7b916/Mobile_phones_in_schools_guidance.pdf

Carwarden House School Policies accessible at:

https://www.carwarden.surrey.sch.uk/Statutory-Policies/

Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy

Behaviour Policy

Online Safety Policy

Acceptable use of ICT & Communication Resources Agreement Policy